

ALMA ZEVI

**Sofia Stevi**  
***The Somnambulists***

April 16 - July 31, 2021  
ALMA ZEVI Venice  
Salizzada Malipiero

The beauty of the imperfect  
The artist Sofia Stevi on the potential of art,  
calligraphy and the female body.

INTERVIEW

July 21, 2021 • Text by [Teresa Hantke](#)

Their black and white bodies have curves, do not correspond to any common ideal of beauty and are noticeable due to their unnatural proportions. But it is precisely through this hardly stylized, natural representation that the Greek artist Sofia Stevi gives her works a special expressiveness. Her art is currently on display at ALMA ZEVI in Venice. Gallerytalk.net spoke to Stevi about cosmetic surgery and how she got into painting cotton shirts.



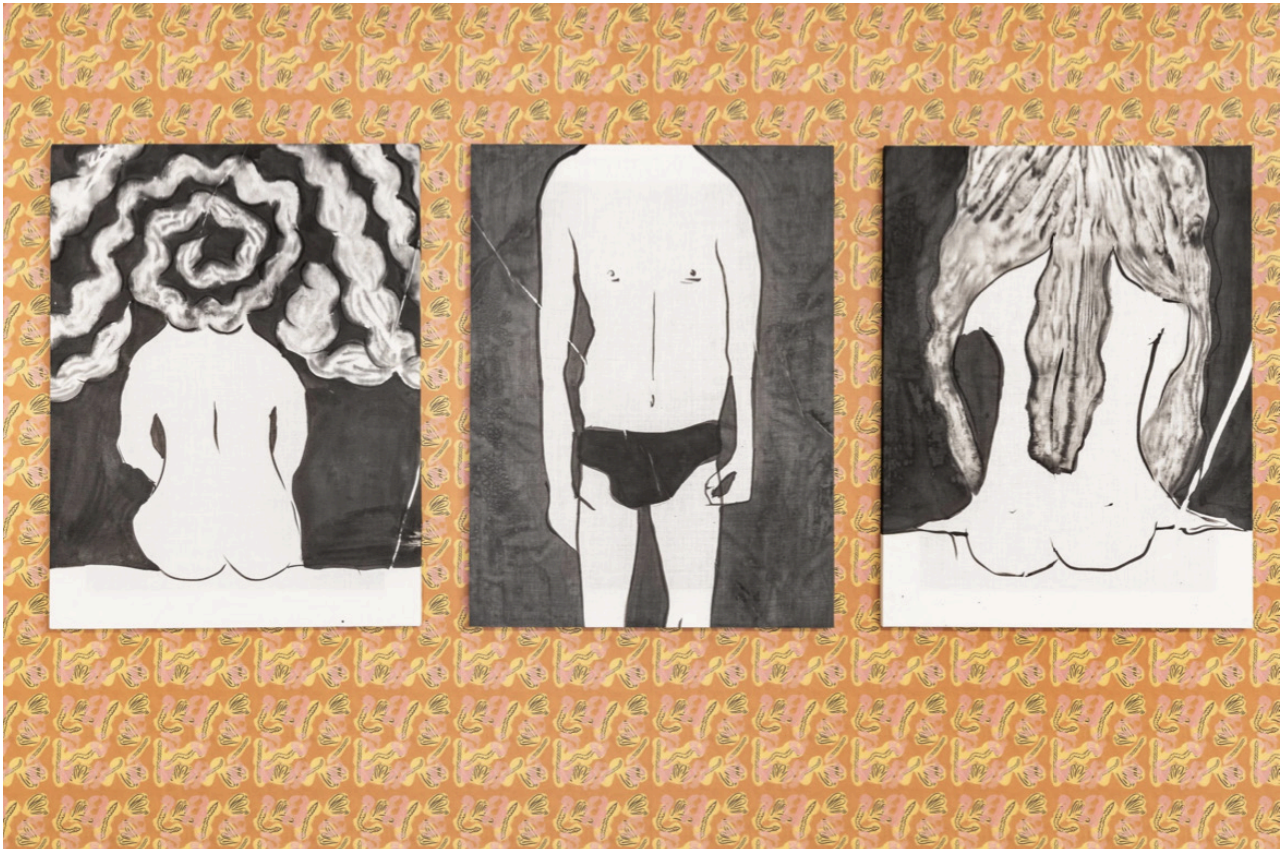
Sofia Stevi, *The Somnambulists*, ALMA ZEVI Venice, April 16 - July 31, 2021 Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI.

**gallerytalk.net: I just got back from Athens and was really excited about the city. What would you say is the current situation for contemporary artists there?**

Shortly before the 14th edition of documenta 2017 took place in Athens, the city was very promising for the young creative scene. I moved from London to Athens at the time and set up a project room here. The documenta was really a step forward for the city's contemporary art scene. Visitors had come from different countries and the galleries had shown impressive exhibitions. It's gotten a bit boring now compared to then. But we still have a lot of options.

**In your pictures, which you are showing in your current exhibition “The Somnambulists” at ALMA ZEVI in Venice, you try to make our inner being - our fear, love and all kinds of human feelings clear. I was wondering if this search was also triggered by the year with the pandemic?**

Not really, because these pictures are actually older. But Alma asked me to show them, and I thought they made sense in this strange situation. When the pandemic started, I didn't really feel the need to make art - I was wondering, well, what's the point in these troubled times? This is bigger than anything else. I had just curated an exhibition in a project room in Athens with artists like Agnieszka Polska, Nana Sahnig, Constance Tenvik and Marianne Vlaschits. We had the opening a week before the lockdown. I remember telling my partner that we had to stay home for a week now. That turned into a year and a half .



Sofia Stevi, *The Somnambulists*, ALMA ZEVI Venice, April 16 - July 31, 2021 Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI.

**Do you think people listened more to their bodies during this time of lockdown? Simply because you were more busy with yourself during your time at home?**

Fortunately, I don't live alone and I have a partner. However, many of my friends are singles, they just spent months with themselves. I do think that through this, many people have developed a closer relationship with their bodies or have allowed themselves to listen to what is going on within them.

**There is something very natural about bodies in your pictures from the “Bodily form” series (2018). Sometimes they remind me of works by the French artist Annette Messager. You 're also trying not to stylize your body in any way, right?**

No, the bodies and their postures should be natural and fragile. I paint them very quickly. With one stroke of the brush, it actually gives them movement. I only use ink, so no mistakes are allowed.



Portrait Sofia Stevi, Courtesy the artist.

**All of the works that you show at ALMA ZEVI are drawn with ink. Does that come from your training as a graphic designer? The fine lines remind me a lot of calligraphy.**

I studied typography, which is very much related to calligraphy. I had some classmates who were really great calligraphers. However, you have to be very patient to be really good at it. And, let's say, have a strong personality. However, I couldn't. I really admired these people, and maybe that's why I started doing something new, but with the same material. When I started as an artist, someone gave me very good advice: “You have to forget about design”. Because as a designer, you have to create something pleasant. But art is not the same. I almost tried not to like what I was doing.



Sofia Stevi, *The Somnambulists*, ALMA ZEVI Venice, April 16 - July 31, 2021 Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI.

**In your opinion, what is the most important difference between design and art?**

When you're a designer, you work for other people. You try to communicate. You also communicate as an artist, but in a completely different way. You don't care if people like what you do or not. It's not about pleasing someone. Sometimes people see art and it opens their eyes. Art is more psychological.

**You also work with cotton. Does that still come from your training as a graphic designer?**

It happened for two reasons. One was that I was kind of afraid to work on canvas, which I do today. A few years ago I was in London and stayed at Alma's house in what was a kind of personal "residency". She gave me some vintage clothes, some very nice cotton shirts. Then I started drawing on them in ink. Since then, cotton has been part of my work. The combination of cotton and ink is really nice. I like it a lot.



Sofia Stevi, *The Somnambulists*, ALMA ZEVI Venice, April 16 - July 31, 2021 Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI.

**So the inspiration came more or less from Alma?**

In a way, yes (*laughs*)!

**I like that your bodies seem vulnerable. We are confronted with perfect bodies every day on, for example, Instagram. You act like the most important thing is to stay fit. What do you think about that?**

We live in a very visual generation. They all look the same - even after plastic surgery. I think we hardly know what beauty means anymore. Beauty is about character and differences. Even the models in the past had different faces. They were real and natural. I think a lot of women like my work precisely because the bodies I paint are not perfect. Many of my collectors are women. Maybe it's about feeling good. I am a woman, and of course a feminist - my art therefore also goes beyond the power of us women!

**WHEN:** The exhibition “ [The Somnambulists](#) ” can be seen until Saturday, July 31st.

**WHERE:** [ALMA ZEVI](#) , Venice Projects, San Marco 3208, Salizzada Malipiero, 30124 Venice.

## Sofia Stevi at ALMA ZEVI Venice

21.07.2021

Text by Kiriakos Spirou

### Info

Sofia Stevi: *The Somnambulists*

16 April - 31 July 2021

### ALMA ZEVI Venice

San Marco 3208, Salizzada Malipiero,  
30124 Venice, Italy

+39 041 5209197

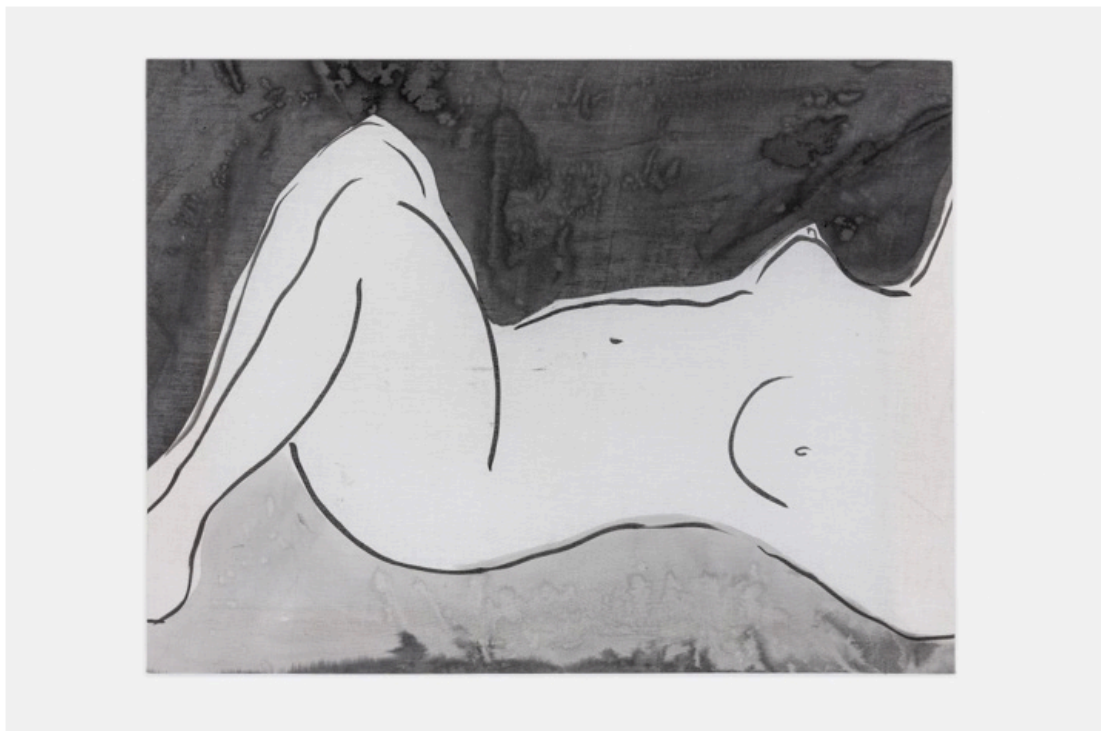
info@almazevi.com

Mon-Sat 10:00-18:00

Athens-based artist Sofia Stevi presents six ink drawings at Alma Zevi in Venice, in a solo exhibition titled *The Somnambulists*. Made in 2018 using Japanese ink on cotton — a signature technique for the artist — the works have the human body as their main theme, focusing on nude male and female torsos.

Using the artist herself, her boyfriend and magazine photos as models, the drawings offer an almost classical take on the human form when compared to Stevi's previous work, which includes oneiric and fragmented compositions that imaginatively blend human body parts, plants, furniture, vegetables and other objects.

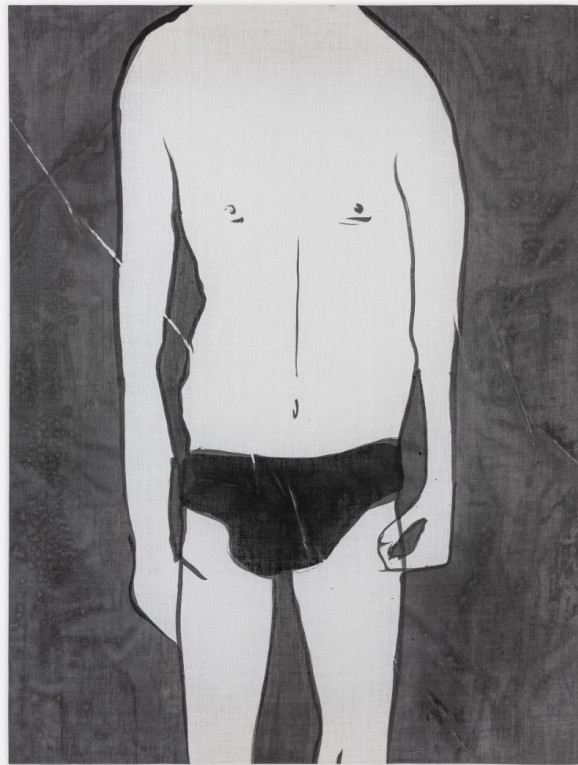
According to the artist's statement included in the exhibition's press release, these drawings were created when she was taking breaks from painting larger works in colour, hence their monochromatic, black palette. Still imbued with the fantastical storytelling Stevi's work is so full of, this body of work is at the same time more sombre and calmer, like more calculated and devoted gazes into the intimate world of familiar bodies.



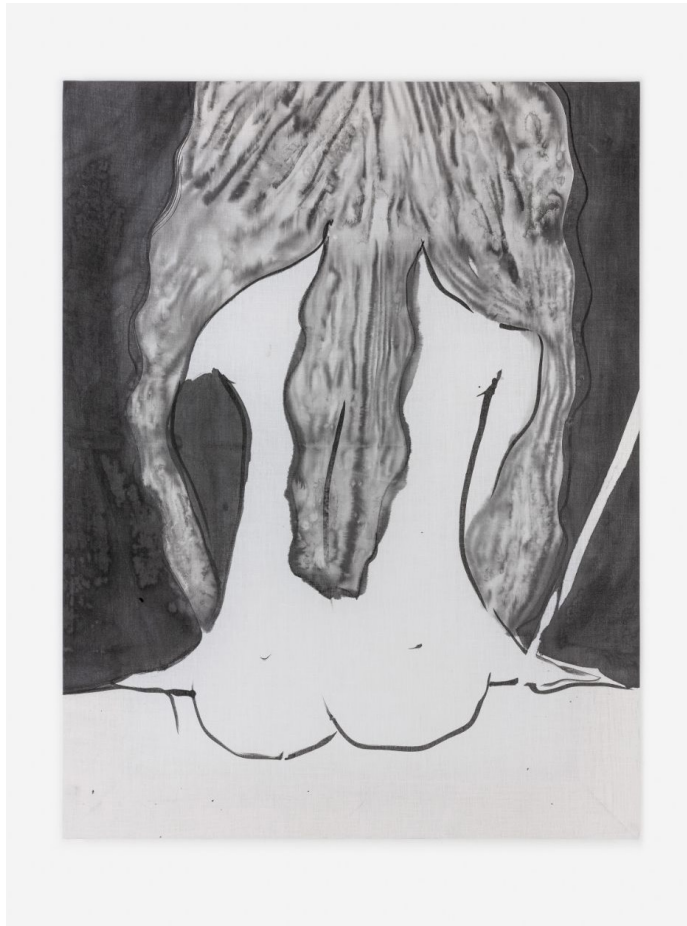
Sofia Stevi, *Bodily Form*, 2018. Japanese ink on cotton mounted on wood. 92 x 69.5 cm. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.



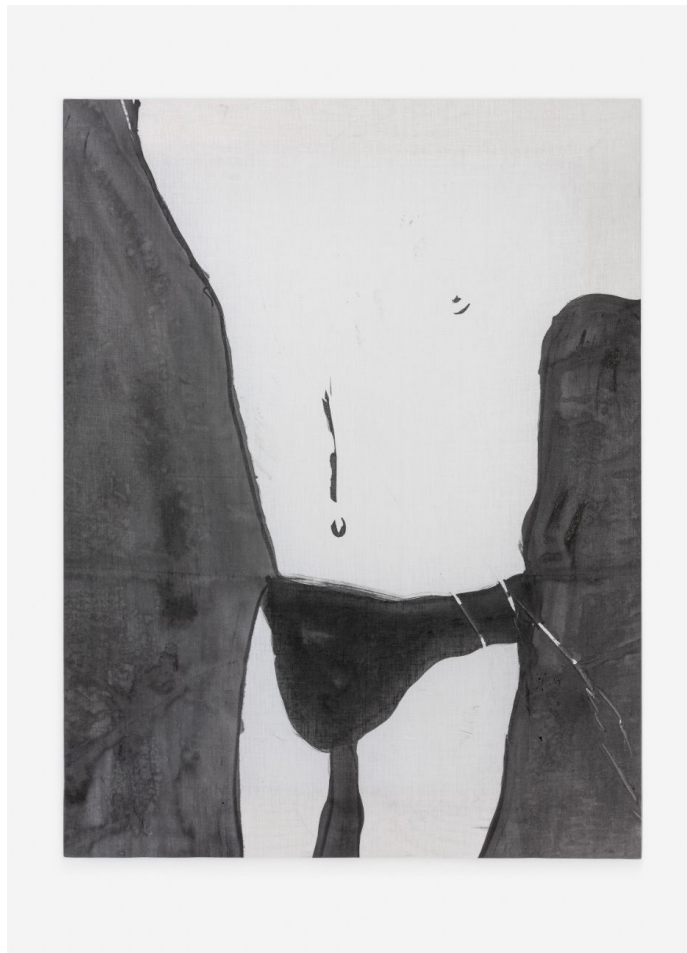
Sofia Stevi, *Bodily Form*, 2018. Japanese ink on cotton mounted on wood. 92 x 69.5 cm. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.



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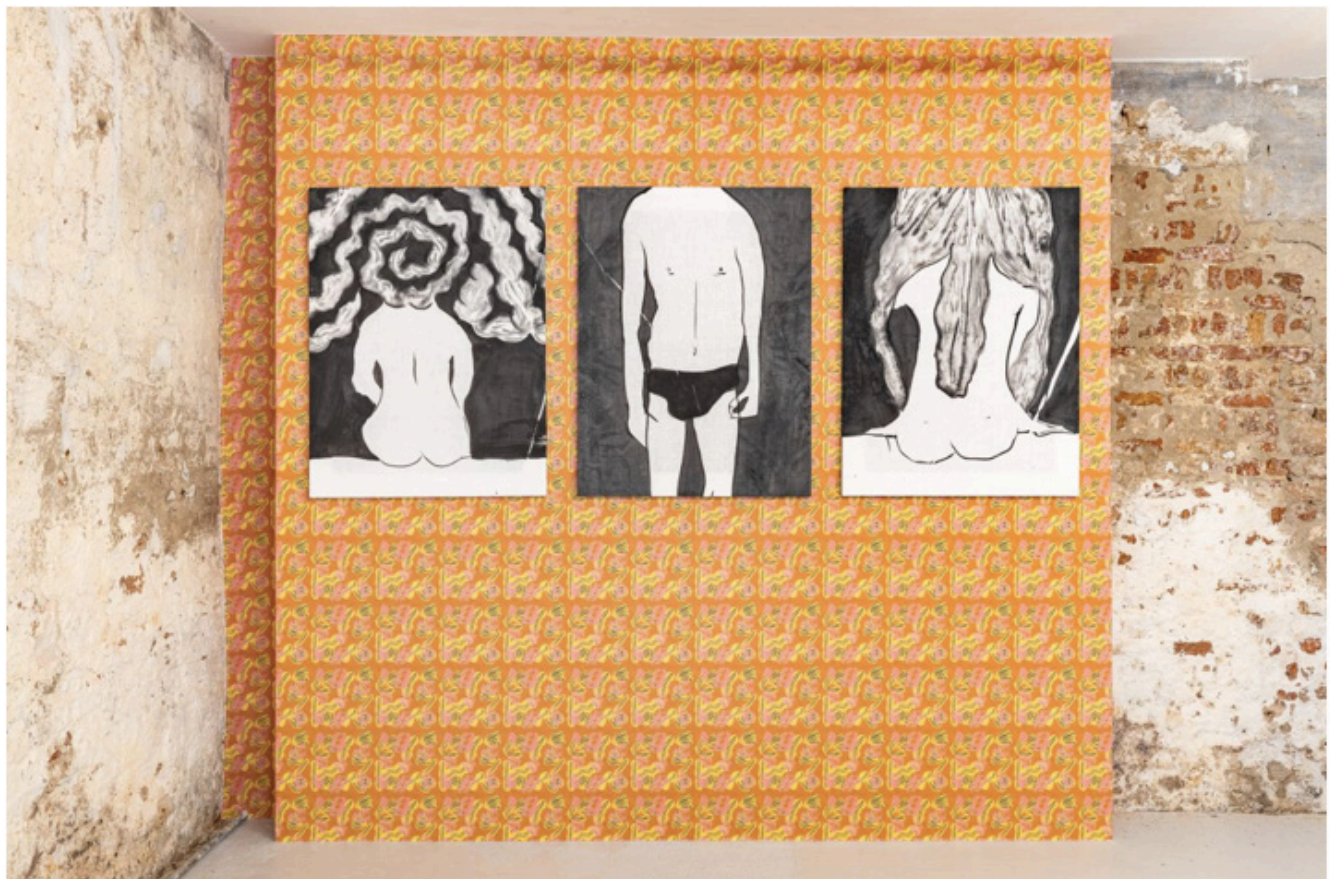
Sofia Stevi, *Bodily Form*, 2018. Japanese ink on cotton mounted on wood. 92 x 69.5 cm. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.



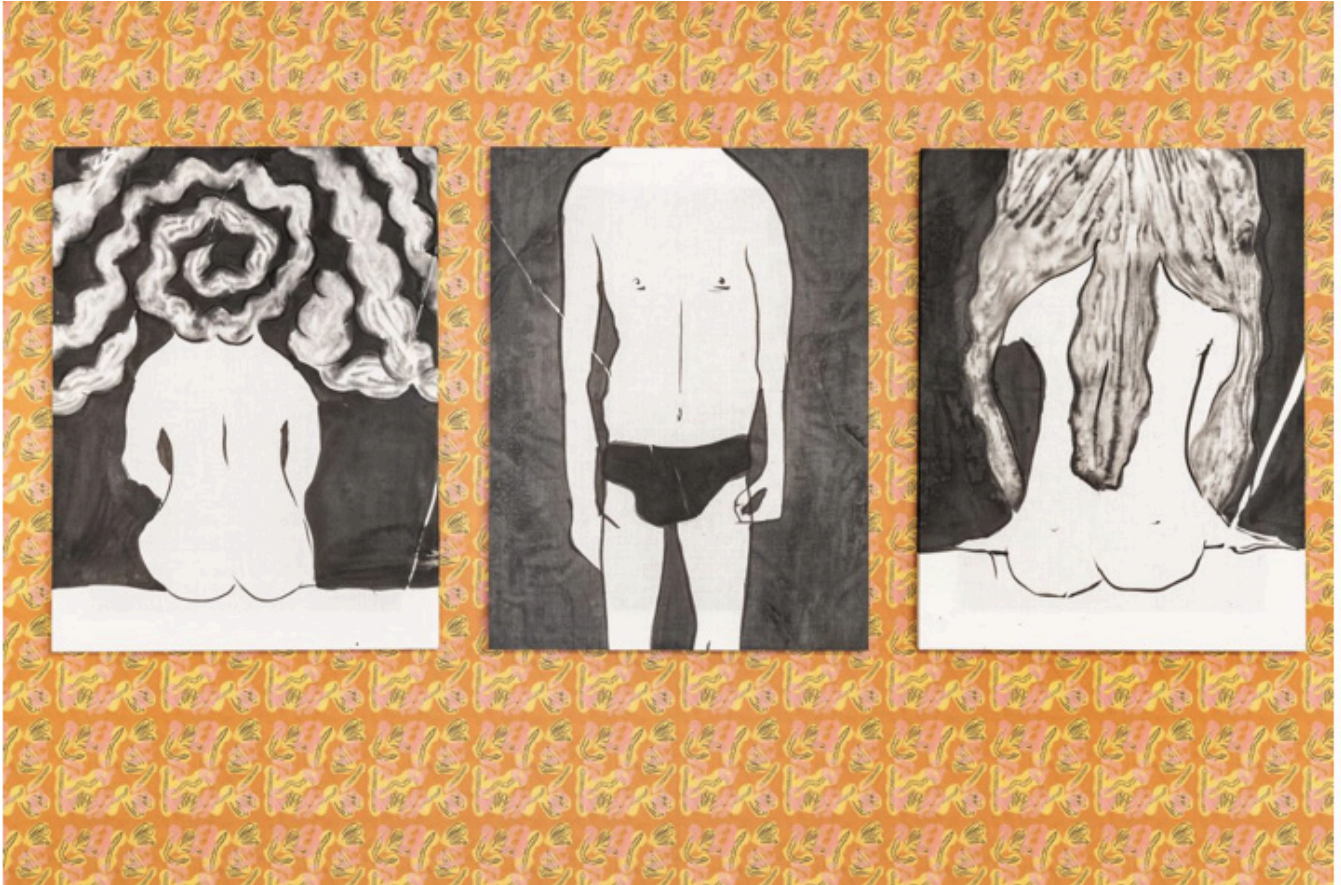
Sofia Stevi, *The Sonnambulists*, installation view. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.



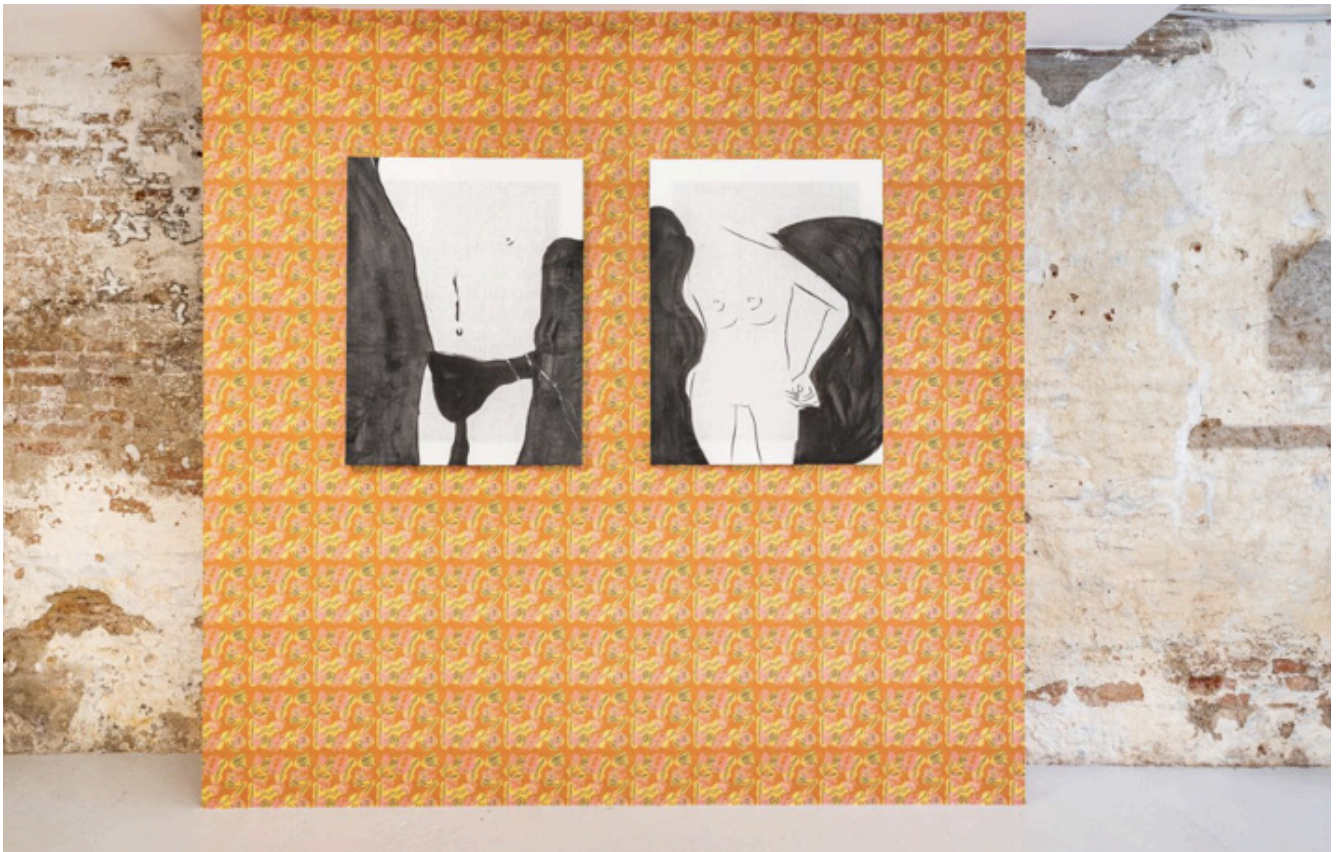
Sofia Stevi, *The Sonnambulists*, installation view. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.



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Sofia Stevi, *The Sonnambulists*, installation view. Photo by Enrico Fiorese. Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.

# SOFIA STEVI'S EXISTENTIAL EXPLORATION OF OUR CHAOTIC IDENTITY LANDS AT ALMA ZEVI VENICE

By Irene Machetti · 27 July 2021  
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ALMA ZEVI Venice presents artist Sofia Stevi's solo show 'The Somnambulists'. A series of black and white figures fluctuating into an undefined space explore our identity, increasingly depersonalised, suffocated, but also looking at a brighter future. Here, Stevi tells us about this exhibition, her use of colours, chaotic narratives and recent existential explorations.



*Sofia Stevi The Somnambulists ALMA ZEVI Venice – 31 July 2021 Photo: Enrico Fiorese Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI*

**The colours in your works always seem very evocative. Here, there is a strong tension between the dark, heavy black and white notes that characterise the figures in your paintings, and the vibrant, lively colours that define the wallpaper. Why did you create this contrast?**

These portraits/ figures are only made with black ink on white cotton. It is the most natural way for me to work and I think it empathises the movement and postures of the bodies. The idea of wallpaper was a curatorial decision, but I have always been interested in pattern-making and surface design. I grew up in a country where we appreciate white walls in most interior decoration but I find wallpapers and murals quite fascinating. The pattern of this specific wallpaper comes from a much older sketch of mine where I decided to maintain the original colours. It provides a fantasy universe for the b&w figures to exist in.



*Sofia Stevi, Bodily Form, 2018. Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI*

**While the wallpaper conveys a sense of chaotic joy, the human figures inhabiting your canvases, bodies where the head is either cut out from the picture or hidden behind cloudy, dense shapes, have a more grotesque feeling. What are you expressing with this contrast?**

I am more interested in painting the experience of the body rather than a certain personality. I am looking at my cat right now and I can find perfection in the way he moves and exists. A natural yogi, he can jump in a shelf full of glass and manage not to break anything. The human body feels weak and unprepared in comparison. But these are the vessels we exist into; they are, indeed, grotesque and this is what I enjoy exploring.



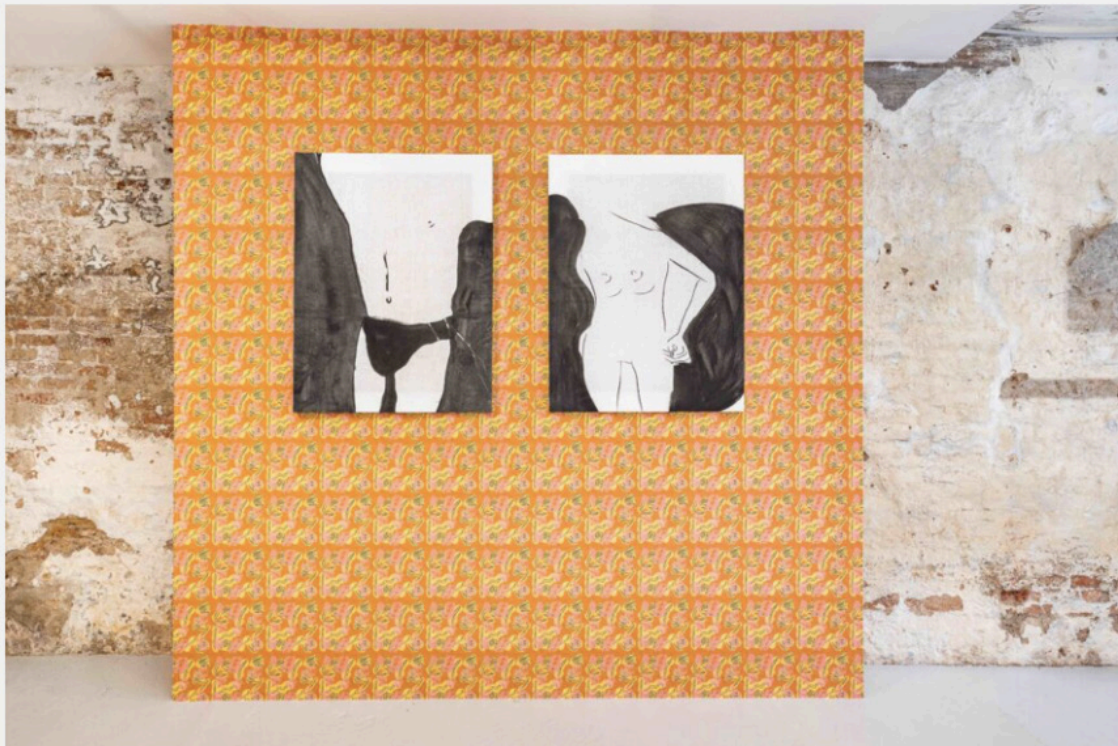
*Sofia Stevi, Bodily Form, 2018. Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI*

**The human body, or parts of it, often recur in your work. Has it always been the subject of your oeuvre? What made it so central for you?**

I like to draw many different things that have to do with my reality, and the human body is, and has always been, fascinating for artists. I am most interested in movement, curvaceous brushstrokes, and imperfections. Even in my much older book sculptures, the whole idea of exploration was based in human spine deformities.

**For 'The Somnambulists' you also started experimenting with male bodies which you were not that familiar with. What encouraged you to get out of your comfort zone?**

It is all about curiosity for the human body. I wanted to look more in-depth at more angular, flat lines and shapes. I do not see the body as a stereotype or as an ideal, it is what we have to do with carrying ourselves in our life on this planet.



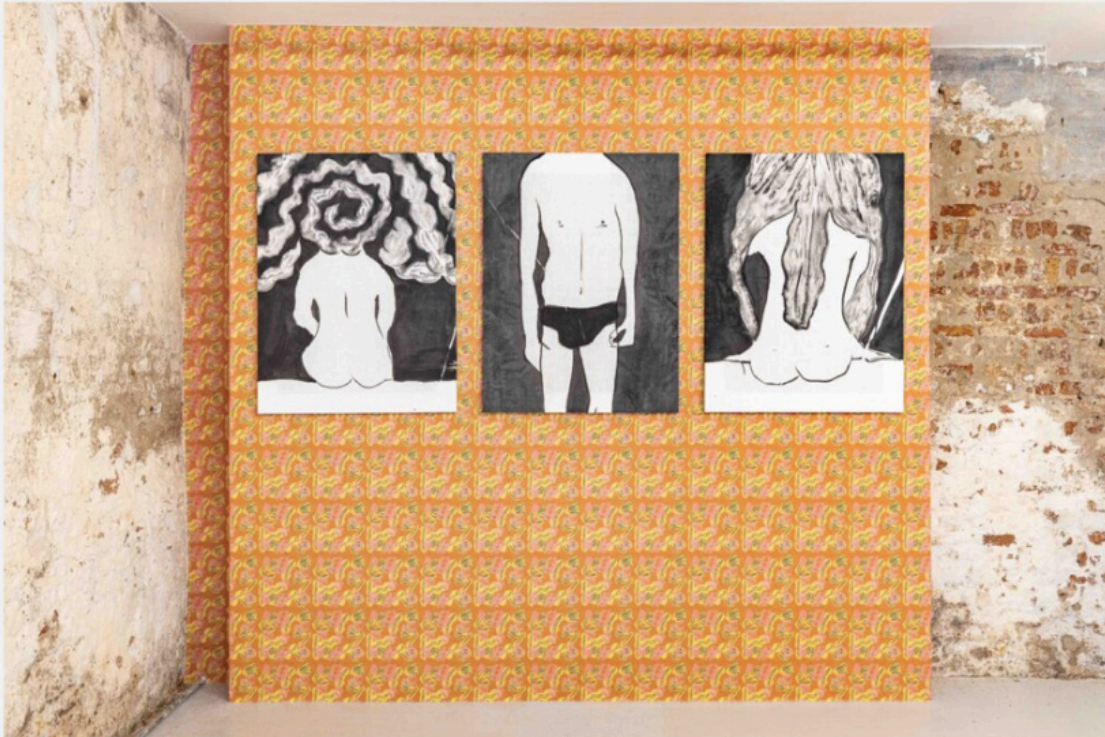
*Sofia Stevi The Somnambulists ALMA ZEVI Venice – 31 July 2021 Photo: Enrico Fiorese Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI*

**The forms you outline are always suspended in a dream-like atmosphere; they emerge abruptly only to disappear right after. Beholders can attempt interpretations as to what they are looking at, but the narratives remain tentative and open to multiple interpretations. How important is it for you to let this mystery take over?**

I am not trying to intentionally create a mystery for the viewer except for when I am? I am happy for someone to make interpretations. When my works leave the studio and, most importantly, when they are exhibited they are freed from the intentions of the artist. As a viewer myself I prefer to enjoy an exhibition before I read the press release.

**You tend to create an intriguing narrative in each of your creations. Do you usually envisage your works as continuous creations, with a never-ending plot-line, or are they separate entities, rather?**

This is such a nice question, makes me think a lot. I would say, definitely, there is a never-ending plot-line, but it exists inside me in a very chaotic way. Perhaps this explains why sometimes I need to stop and think and write things down.



*Sofia Stevi, The Somnambulists, ALMA ZEVI Venice. Photo credits: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy: The Artist and ALMA ZEVI*

**In this exhibition figures stand-alone, each delimited by the edges of the canvas where they lie still. Does this have any correlation with the ideas of isolation and solitude that still linger in the air? Are you moving to a more existential exploration of bodies?**

Even though I made these works quite before our current situation, they have never been exhibited before and I believe it was the right time for them to come out. I think even previous to the lockdown we were still leading very individualistic lives with a lot of privacy and exaggerated online existences. The covid period that we are still going through is a harsh realisation of isolation and suffocation but it has also created the conditions to start caring for each other again. Just the act of going around wearing a mask is an example of caring for the person standing next to you. I believe during the pandemic everyone became a little existentialist. Unfortunately, we are living through tough times and perhaps it will become harder for the younger generations, not only in terms of the pandemic but also of climate change. These days I am thinking a lot about the human body, nature, as well as the natural implications on the human body.

**Often your paintings expand beyond the edge of the canvas, either by elongating it with new patches of cloth, creating an environment all-around or, as you did at ALMA ZEVI's by designing the wallpaper behind the wall-hung paintings. What is it that pushes you to go beyond the physical delimitation of the canvas?**

I would say it happens naturally; it can be very liberating not to think of the stretcher as a limit. Sometimes it makes sense for it to be there, other times everything can happen.

**Sofia Stevi 'The Somnambulist' at ALMA ZEVI Venice - July 31st**

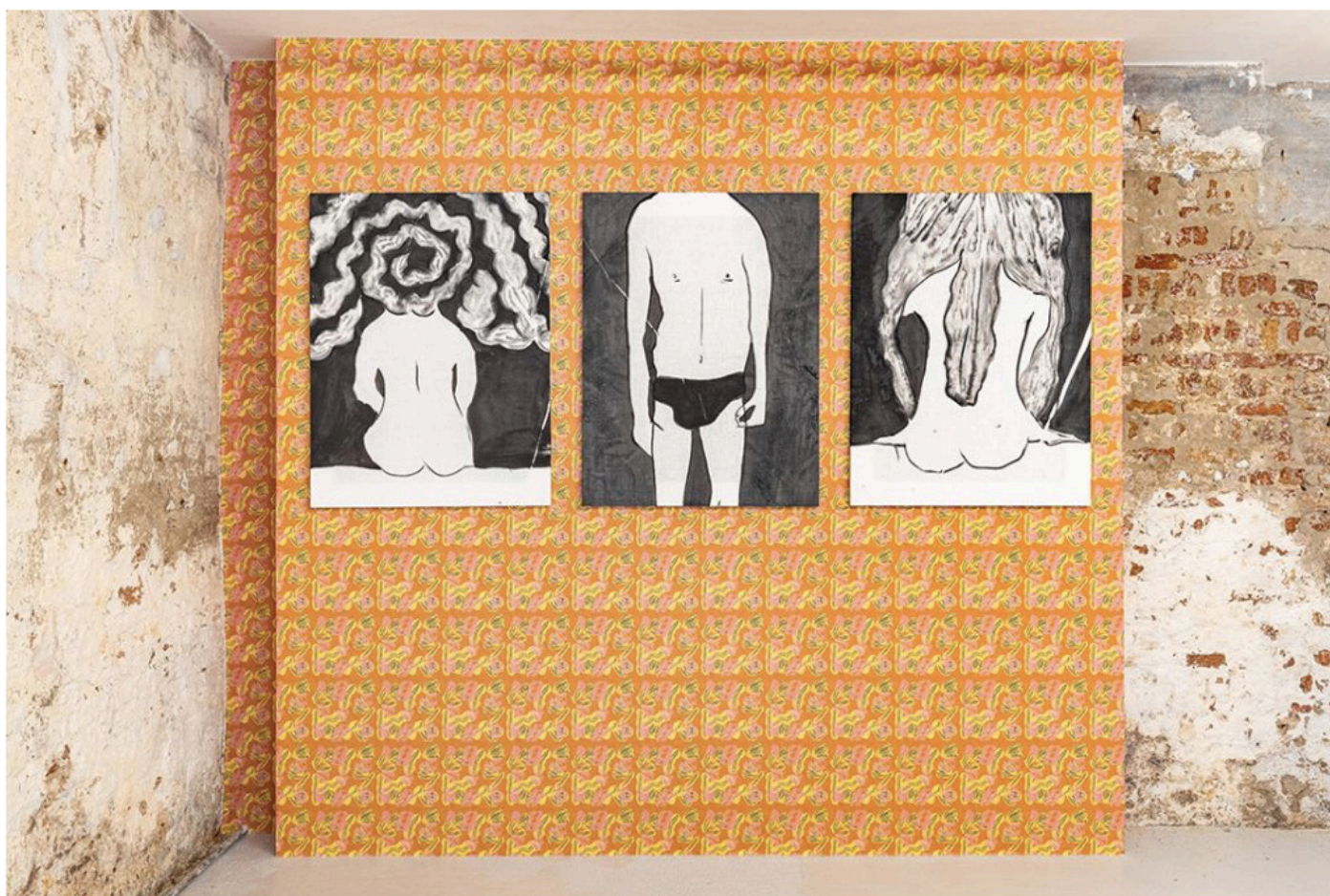
di Redazione | 24 Giugno 2021

# SOFIA STEVI THE SOMNAMBULISTS

CONTROLLARE PREVENTIVAMENTE ESATTEZZA DEI DATI SU MOSTRA, ORARI E CONDIZIONI D'INGRESSO NEL SITO

**Nei lavori di Sofia Stevi i ricordi del mondo antico convivono con la vita di tutti i giorni.**

SOFIA STEVI THE SOMNAMBULISTS



Sofia Stevi The Somnambulists, Installation view

Alma Zevi è un progetto culturale dedicato all'arte contemporanea con Ufficio a Londra, spazio progetti a Celerina in Svizzera e sede espositiva a Venezia.

Da metà aprile la Galleria propone a Venezia una mostra personale dell'artista greca Sofia Stevi, nata ad Atene nel 1982.

La ricerca e la produzione artistica di Sofia Stevi è piena di lirismo e spazia dalla pittura alla scultura, dalla realizzazione di libri alla poesia.

Nei suoi lavori i ricordi del mondo antico convivono con la vita di tutti i giorni, dando luogo a composizioni dalle narrazioni enigmatiche e spesso spezzate.

Nel suo processo istintivo di pittura, pensieri e idee convergono in uno stato onirico e creano opere d'arte al contempo poetiche e drammatiche.

Linee calligrafiche descrivono figure sognanti che non sono fissate nel tempo o nello spazio, non c'è un primo piano o uno sfondo, ma piuttosto un'attenta visione delle forme umane.

Dipingere la figura umana è, per l'artista, come comprendere il suo spazio interno: le sue paure, come sta invecchiando, i motivi per cui il suo corpo a volte cede e altre la fa sentire così bene, la felicità che prova, come si relaziona alle altre persone e crea connessioni.

Con questi pensieri Stevi interpreta i suoi dipinti come un legame ideale tra fantasia e realtà.

A Venezia propone una serie di lavori concentrati sulla figura umana, opere in cui usa inchiostro e forme bianche, nere e grigie.

La maggior parte di questi soggetti femminili sono presi da suoi ricordi fotografici o da immagini di modelle su riviste, ad alcune delle quali ha aggiunto anche motivi grafici più elaborati.

Non mancano però dipinti con forme maschili, opere alle quali riconosce un certo grado di esistenzialismo e naturalezza.

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**DATA FINE:** 31/07/2021

**LUOGO:** VENEZIA – Galleria Alma Zevi

**INDIRIZZO:** Salizzada San Samuele – San Marco 3357

**TEL:** +39 041 5209197

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.almazevi.com/exhibitions/venice/457/the-somnambulists/>

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#### ORARI DI APERTURA

- Da lunedì a sabato 10.00 – 18.00

#### INFO

- <https://www.almazevi.com/exhibitions/>
  - +39 041 5209197
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