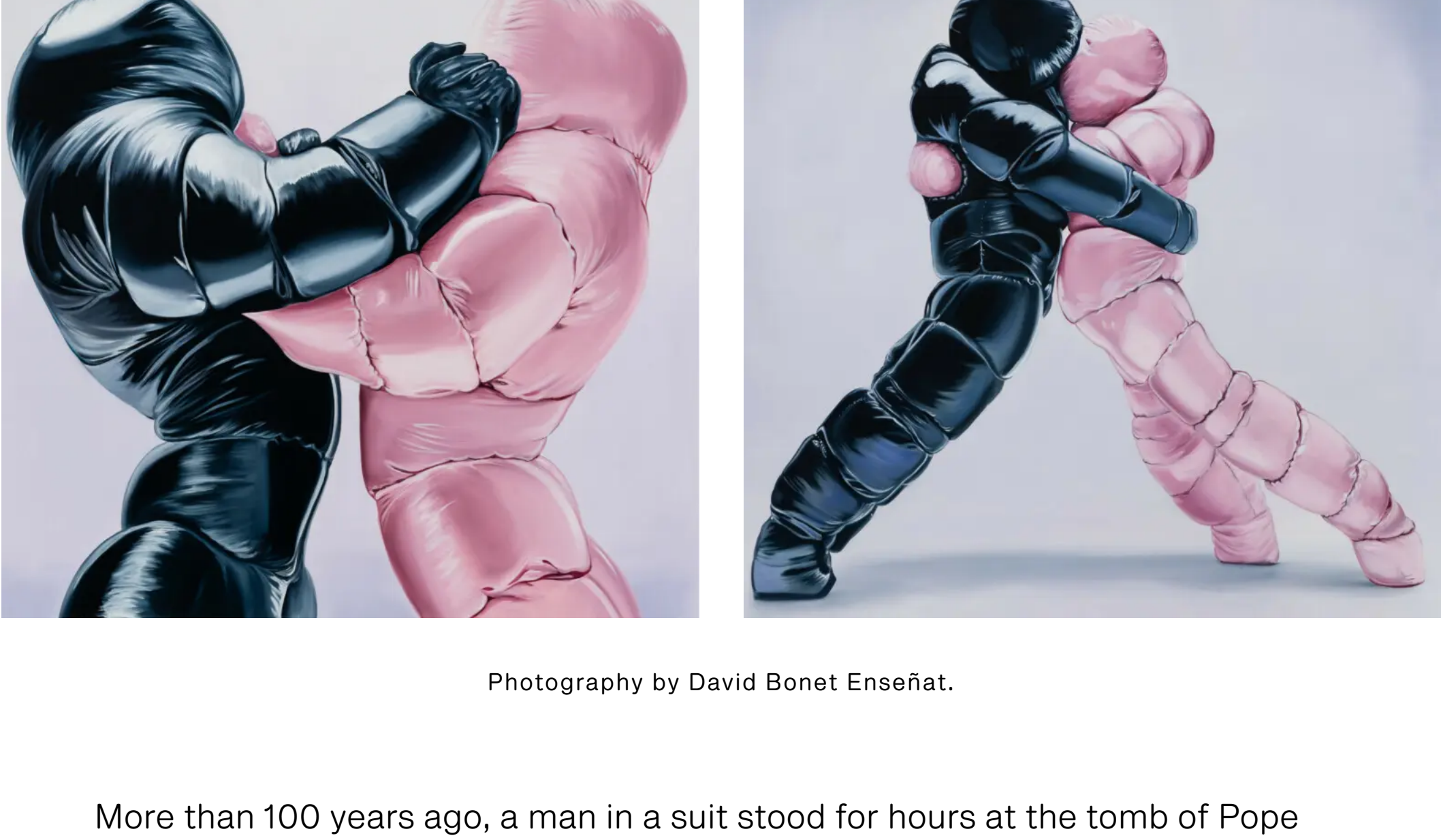


Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost

Charlie Stein turns the fragmented contradictions of our present into eerie mirrors of subjective truth.

20 October, 2025



Photography by David Bonet Enseñat.

More than 100 years ago, a man in a suit stood for hours at the tomb of Pope Julius II in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli. He had traveled from Vienna, as he had done several times before, to stand before this one sculpture that forms part of the tomb: Michelangelo's *Moses*. Only a year later, this man would begin an academic text with the following words: "I must preface by admitting that I am no connoisseur of art, but a layman. For many of the means and effects of art, I actually lack proper understanding."

In the following twenty pages, the founding father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, despite his "lack of proper understanding," found plenty of words to analytically dissect Michelangelo's *Moses* and describe the artist's "intention." It is curious that the foremost advocate of unconscious determinants should seek such definite intentions in art. Following Freud's interpretation, which deviates freely from the Old Testament, we see Moses frozen in the moment when the will of the ego gains control over the instinctual impulses of the id. For Michelangelo, known for his aggression, these were crucial themes; the artist supposedly sublimated his inner conflicts through the act of working the material itself. The personal struggle is resolved in the artwork.



Charlie Stein by Dale Grant.

A hundred years later, the description of the present reads like a résumé written on the eve of two world wars: Rapid technological progress devalues human labor, the environment collapses in favor of free-market interests, political unrest turns into nationalist madness, and social structures begin to crumble. In short: everything gets higher, faster, further — but, unfortunately, also worse.

Instead of a tomb sculpture in a Roman church, we now find ourselves before paintings in the CCA Art Hall on Mallorca—though the Centro Cultural Andratx itself, architecturally, resembles a sacred fortress. Stein's previous paintings, in a sense, connect to Freud's psychoanalytic tradition: she renders visible the effects of the environment on the subject. Her paintings appear socially critical and contemporary, exposing feelings of isolation and disorientation without depicting any explicit technological references. The symbols she deliberately integrates can just as easily signify their opposite.



Photography by David Bonet Enseñat.

In her current and largest solo exhibition to date at the Mallorcan art hall, we see two central figures that reappear in different positions—entwined, leaning against one another, or pushing against each other. Their poses are insistently ambiguous, even contradictory: violent struggle or loving embrace. Because of their wet-look puffer jackets, the genderless figures cannot be clearly identified; their inflated garments envelop them from head to toe, hinting at opposition only through color—pink and black. Their interwoven arrangements, precisely because of this suggested dichotomy, recall chromosomes: X and Y, female and male, pink and black. As if in a laboratory on an open day, the paintings hang individually along the walls, the white space of the art hall dominating the presentation. It feels as though research reports have been visualized and pinned to the wall, allowing the audience to grasp the current state of study. Spoiler: it leaves an *eerie feeling*.

A single, latex-covered figure stands tensely, hands bound behind its back. In another painting, a latex-clad portrait from head to shoulders appears "more clearly" female, long blond hair cascading over latex skin. Other works suggest femininity through contours of hips and breasts, only to have this certainty undermined by the next image showing a close-up of a thigh. A recurring syringe implies hormonal treatment in various contexts: illness, pregnancy, bodybuilding.



Photography by David Bonet Enseñat.

The complex network of politics, society, economy, technology, and environment that holds our world together is tangled in many places. The Donald Trumps and Elon Musks of our world post memes that shape global events and immortalize themselves in the memes that their behavior spawns. They decry censorship yet tolerate no dissenting opinions on their platforms. They demand freedom while embodying everything that contradicts their ideology. They proclaim equality while deporting those whose skin color differs from their own. To exist consciously is to be exposed to contradictions: *Dubito, ergo sum*.

It is such circumstances that Charlie Stein playfully transforms into something deceptively light, like kittens floating in water, only to reveal their underlying menace. She shows us that the image politics of our time have detached from "truth" itself and now position truth in relation to its own antithesis: realism versus surrealism, man versus woman, alienation versus intimacy, subjective truth versus objective explanation. Would Freud, despite all ambiguity, still have found a definite „intention“ in this tension after all?



Photography by David Bonet Enseñat.

It is worth tracing the conceptual framework the artist has installed. Charlie Stein titled her central series *Parthenogenesis*, while the exhibition launched under the title *Everything not saved will be lost*. The latter quotes the Nintendo-branded *memento mori* of the 1990s and 2000s, translated here into a painterly credo of documentation. What once served as a warning signal for video-game enthusiasts, Stein transforms into the potential of painting to literally record and continuously interrogate the present. Painting as "analog hard drive" and "resistant archive."

The exhibition title is linked to the series of works, "*Parthenogenesis*", which literally translates to "virgin birth." The examples of *Parthenogenesis* occur in nature are not the same as the "immaculate conception" of the Virgin Mary. Etymologically, the word itself comes from the idea of creating life from an egg that hasn't been fertilized. Especially in natural science, parthenogenesis encompasses the birth of a clone of the mother, usually of female sex. Both in literature—such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Herland"—and in mythology—Gaia, Nyx, Hera—there are examples of parthenogenesis, that can inspire ideas of societies and worlds like those of the Amazons or matriarchal systems. Models that, accelerated by the information distribution technologies of the past four decades, have gained new momentum and are increasingly being simulated in order to present alternatives to the patriarchally-shaped history of modernity.



Photography by David Bonet Enseñat.

Finally, this brings us back to Freud. More interesting than his analysis of Michelangelo's *Moses* are his motives for making it. Freud's repeated visits coincided with the period when C. G. Jung, once his protégé, had evolved into a usurper of psychoanalysis. Feeling betrayed in his role as intellectual father, Freud describes Moses as acting and thinking precisely as he himself must have felt at that time. Martin Schuster, psychologist and co-founder of the "Cologne School of Art Therapy," wrote insightfully about Freud's reflection: "Thus the artwork becomes a projection surface upon which less the 'objective' truth of psychoanalytic interpretation is reflected than the subjective truth of the interpreter."

This, ultimately, is the source of the *eerie feelings* Charlie Stein's paintings evoke—as *eerie as reality itself*. Stein condenses the images of our present and their ambivalences. Projection surfaces for the subjective truths of their interpreters.

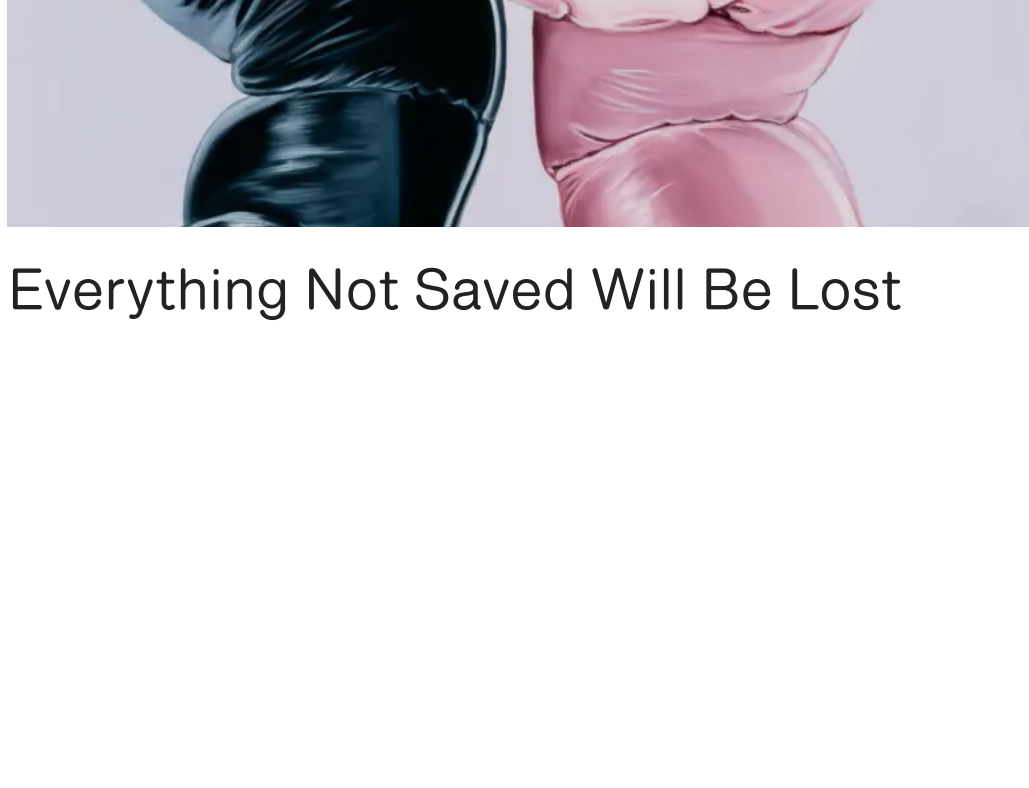
By Marcus Boxler

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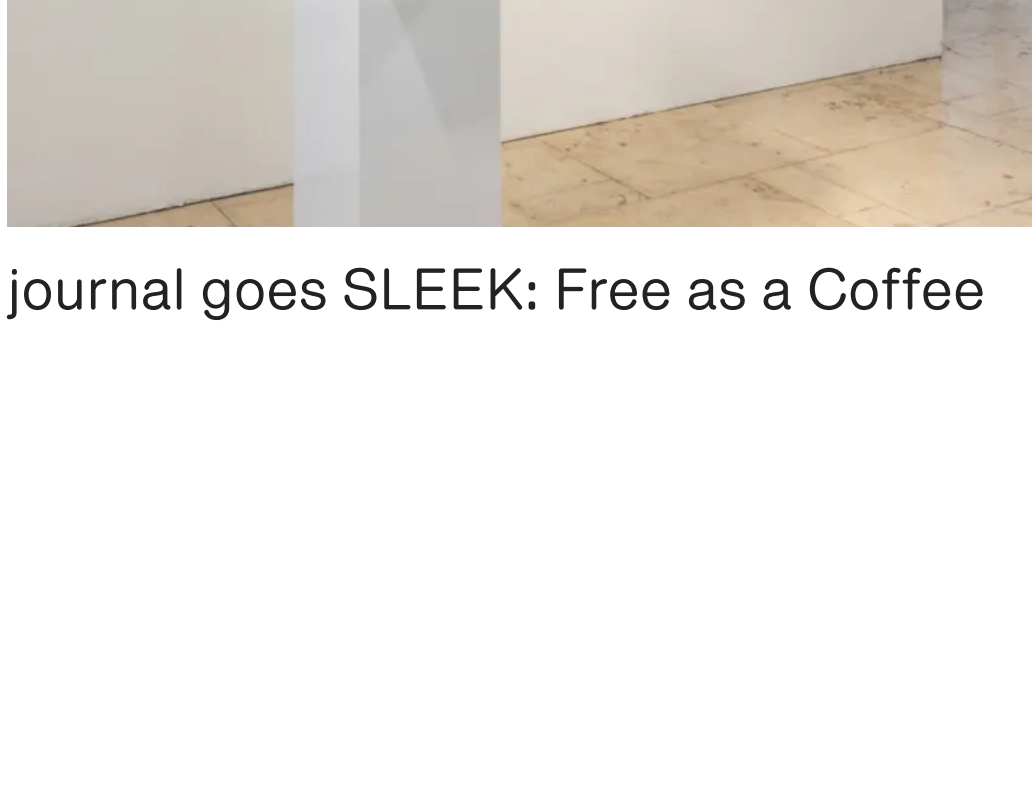
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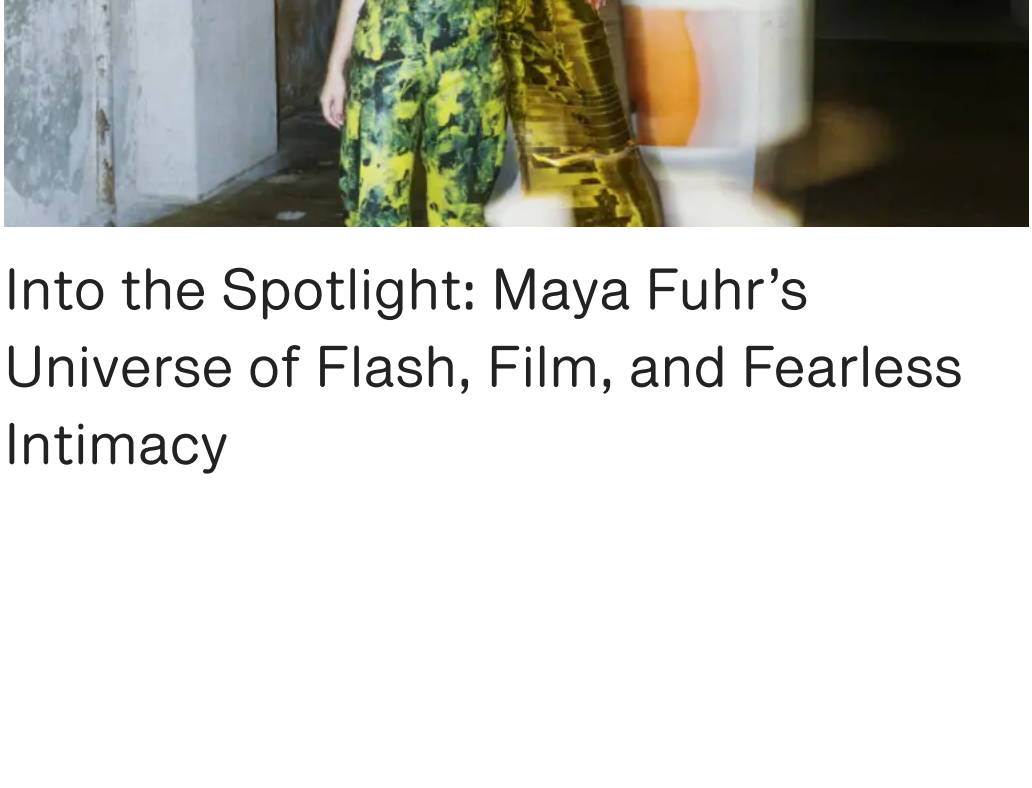
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