

MAJER'S DIANA & ACTAEON

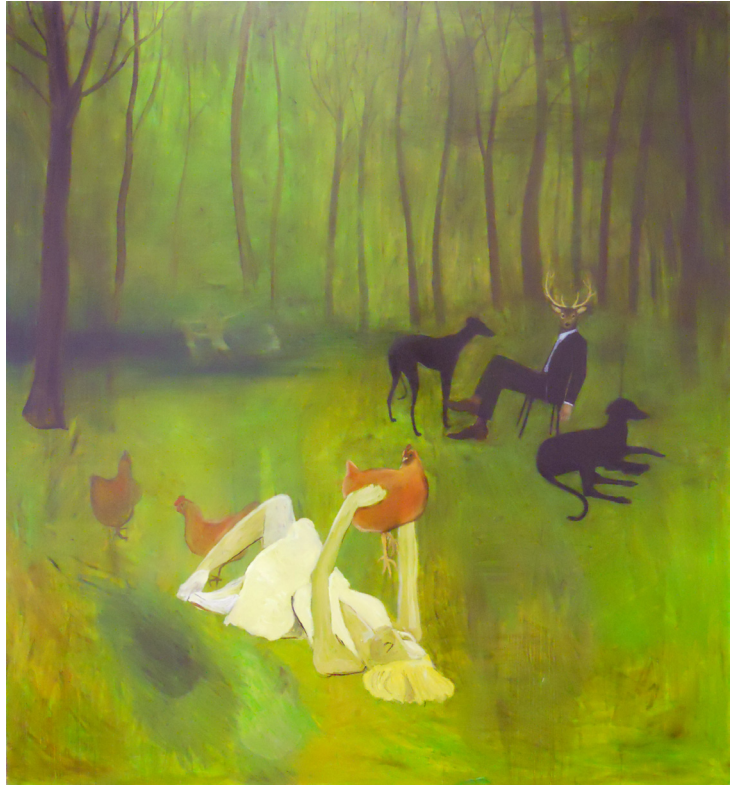
The myth of Actaeon and Diana is infused with a multiplicity of meanings, versions and interpretations. The Roman goddess Diana was known to the Greeks as Artemis, and was the protector of wild animals, the wilderness, women's virginity and fertility. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Actaeon is in the forest with his hunting dogs when he accidentally stumbles upon Diana-Artemis while she bathes naked in a stream. Diana turns Actaeon into a stag and his own dogs ruthlessly tear him apart. Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-9) and *The Death of Actaeon* (1565-76) render Ovid's narratives into a masterful retelling of the ironic downfall of Actaeon, the hunter who becomes the hunted.

There are numerous variants to Actaeon's tale. According to the Hellenistic poet Callimachus, Artemis forbade Actaeon of any speech so as to ensure that he would not share what he had seen.

However, when Actaeon hears the call of his hunting friends in the woods, he calls out to them and is immediately changed into a stag. In Euripides' *Bacchae* Actaeon's sin was boasting that he was a better hunter than Artemis; other interpretations of Actaeon's transgressions range from his wanting to marry Diana-Artemis to the hounds belonging to Diana-Artemis.

Majer's *Diana and Actaeon* is a contemporary interpretation of this illustrious myth and is inspired by Titian's master works. Majer's adaptation substitutes Diana-Artemis with 20th century celebrity goddess Marilyn Monroe, while retaining Diana's virginity in the pure whiteness of Marilyn's iconic dress. Similarly, Diana's nymphs become chickens signifying the herd culture that celebrities represent as their star-studded fans follow their 'role-models' mindlessly. In Majer's painting, Actaeon is surprisingly relaxed as he has relinquished his fears and shifted into a mode of spiritual awareness: His antlers point to the heavens as he enjoys the tranquillity of the forest. Similarly, his hounds are calm, and respectively portray a Freudian super-ego and unconscious as they sit harmoniously above and below Actaeon.

Majer's work combines traditional and contemporary imagery while retelling and re-interpreting the story of Diana and Actaeon. Majer has visited the National Gallery and researched Titian's works extensively while adding his own images to this classic tale. His nymphs turned chickens represent cheap entertainment, blind ideology, and fast and genetically modified food; Majer's radical transformation of Actaeon draws upon Mayan iconography where a stag head represents wisdom and higher knowledge. In the background of Majer's work, a faint threesome of bathers are present, symbolizing change and the unknown: The future remains uncertain and yet, there is nothing to fear.



HRVOJE MAJER *Diana and Actaeon* Oil on Canvas 190 x 170 cm, 2010