

4 COLUMNS

AUGUST 23, 2024

OUR SUMMER ART PICKS - MAJA RUZNIC: THE WORLD DOESN'T END

By Johanna Fateman



Maja Ruznic: *The World Doesn't End*, installation view. Courtesy the artist and Karma. © Maja Ruznic.
Pictured, left: *Arrival of Wild Gods II*, 2023.

At Karma, four tremendous paintings, like murals or picture windows, present astral yet earthy scenes of mythological-seeming significance in the most transporting—or teleporting—show of my summer. Maja Ruznic's smaller works on paper (which fill another of the gallery's spaces on Second Street) are also great: semiabstract compositions of biomorphic forms and geometric scaffoldings, punctuated by an arcane lexicon (radiant eyeballs and threadlike lines, suggesting umbilical, narrative, and psychic connections between things). But it is in the panoramic canvases of *The World Doesn't End*, for which she switches from gouache to oils, that the painter's rich palette takes on a gemstone vibrance, her imagery rendered with scumbled veils of color to appear torchlit, reflected in dark pools, or shaded by forest canopies.

Ruznic, who had two paintings in the just-closed Whitney Biennial—entrancing wild cards in an exhibition light on figurative painting—was born in the former Yugoslavia in 1983 and fled the Bosnian War as a child, living with her mother in European refugee camps before settling in California in 1995. (She now lives in New Mexico.) Personal history and our geopolitical present inform the themes of cataclysm and displacement felt in her arrangements of apparitional and extraterrestrial figures. *The Dark Place of Star Lines and Electricity* shows its translucent wanderers in profile, embraced by a hazy, cerulean-and-chlorophyll architecture of concentric, upside-down arches. I thought of Marc Chagall at his trippiest and most folkloric, as well as of the occultist painter Paulina Peavy, who channeled the spirit Lacamo to articulate an ancient,

cosmological past (and utopian future). And if I had to choose, I'd say Ruznic's smoldering, autumnal-hued *Arrival of Wild Gods II* is my favorite work—a woodland drama crowded with curious and mourning visitants; a pagan pietà with a Maleficent Mary figure and a slumping corpse at its heart; a tragedy promising rebirth.