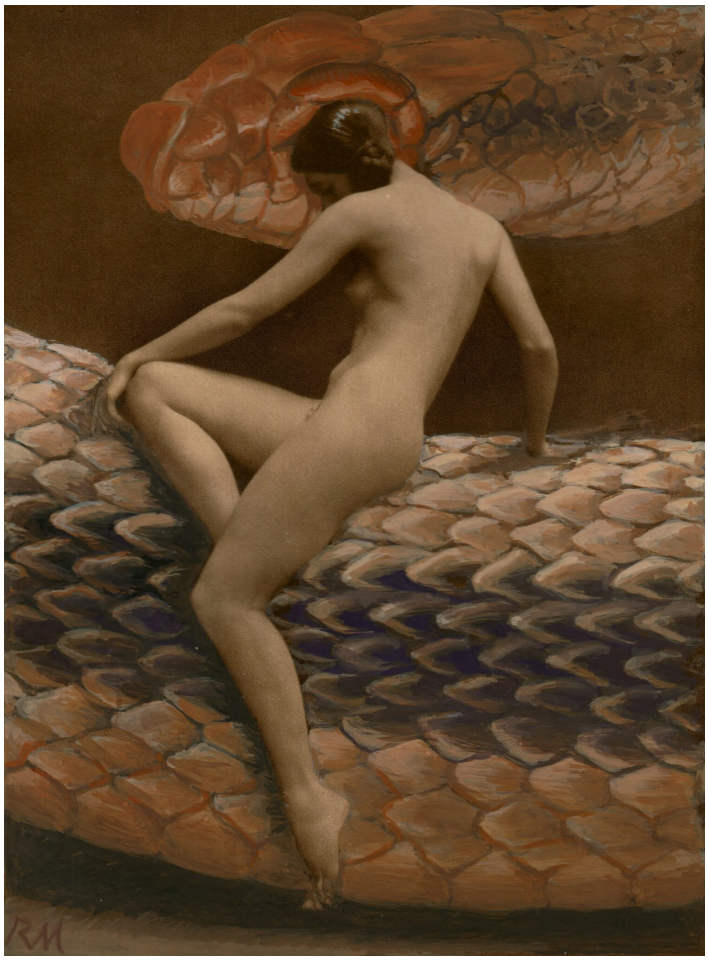
VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE



Ruth Marten

Maiden Voyage

14.11.2026–16.01.2027

Since 2022, New York artist Ruth Marten has been immersed in creating a series of works based on sepia-toned heliogravure images from the Art Deco period. In 1923, the *Librairie des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris published the portfolio 'NUS' comprised of one hundred pictures, each featuring an individual naked dancing girl—very risqué images for the time,

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which probably accounts for the huge success of the publication. The author Laryew—a pseudonym of Stanislas Waléry (1863–1935) —was a star photographer who had made a name for himself portraying dancers from the Paris nightlife milieu of the day; the revue, variety show and nightclub. Ruth Marten first discovered these wonderful photogravures as loose individual sheets. When she later found out that the pictures were part of a comprehensive ensemble she determined to rework all one hundred prints, resulting in Marten's most extensive cohesive work complex, which would occupy her artistic focus for many years and is still ongoing. In the exhibition *Maiden Voyage* we will show a long frieze of twenty-five works from the cycle, created in the period from 2022 to 2026.

Ruth Marten likes to emphasize that in reworking the historical source images she is not so much appropriating them but rather putting herself in their place—in fact, she occupies both the perspective of the young women portrayed and that of the photographer. The reworking of historical images is also an act of questioning authenticity and originality, a reflection of post-modern skepticism vis-à-vis claims to truth. Whether with India ink, collage and aquarelle on 18th century engravings or with opaque gouache on photogravures from the early 20th century, her interventions always relocate the preexisting images to completely new, often highly cryptic scenarios. The focus on visual details and transformation challenges viewers to reexamine and recalibrate their own perception.

From Laryew's naked dancing girls Ruth Marten extrapolates a very precise sort of ambivalence: it's all about the discrepancy between the revolutionary stirrings of the 1920s that strived to liberate the body, eloquently expressed in the characteristic poses, and the still male-dominated view of female eroticism. To be able to respond intellectually and artistically to each individual page in the portfolio the artist engages intensively, one on one, with each of "her girls", establishing a "relationship" that generates a sort of energy transfer. In this cycle her interest lies foremost in the theme of the feminine and processes of female self-assertion and liberation. Marten's overpaintings and transformations enable the girls to now live out all of their fantasies: to metamorphose, to have fun, to bubble over, to beam, to vanish into thin air. Here, we again encounter the signature motifs from Ruth Marten's marvelous visual universe: hair, crocodiles, pearls and jewelry, bubbling springs, plants, eyes, cocoons and tattoos. Ruth Marten's indefatigable production gives us works full of poetry, unbridled subversion and lightheartedness, but also lusty humor and the keen and

sensitive insight of a profound mind.

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Ruth Marten (*1949) attended the High School of Art & Design in New York and studied at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. She went on to work as a tattoo artist in 1970s and was a pioneer in the field of artistic tattoos in connection with the underground scene of the time. From the 1980s, Marten focused on book and magazine illustration, also creating fashion drawings for the likes of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, et al. and also collaborated with music labels and news dailies.

Ruth Marten was already using the later central techniques of overpainting and collage at the time. It was painting that would ultimately lead, in 2003, to her enduring passion for the work with antique prints and vintage photographs as the basis for unfolding her own artistic cosmos.

2013 saw the first Ruth Marten solo show at the Van der Grinten Galerie. The gallery went on to initiate, facilitate and/or produce numerous monographs, participation in institutional exhibitions and solo shows, including *Dream Lover*, a major retrospective at the Max Ernst Museum in Brühl to mark the artist's 70th birthday. The 2019 show, which comprised the most comprehensive overview of Ruth Marten's painting, sculptural and graphic works to date, and the accompanying voluminous book, received multiple awards. In 2025, sixty overpainted photogravures were presented for the first time at the solo exhibition *All about Eve* at the Kunstmuseum Villa Zanders in Bergisch Gladbach near Cologne. The accompanying book is available at the Van der Grinten Galerie.