

SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

JULIA WORONOWICZ - Secret Meeting

Special guest Ala Sowiar | HALO LABELS

Exhibition: May 29 - June 27, 2026

We are pleased to announce Julia Woronowicz's first solo show with SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY. In her exhibition *Secret Meeting* we will present twelve works on canvas, two tapestries, and one sculptural work by the Warsaw based artist alongside a textile installation by Berlin based fashion designer Ala Sowiar (Halo Labels), created especially for the exhibition and based on Woronowicz's visual language.

Julia Woronowicz treats painting as a site of uncovering – not so much a surface as a palimpsest, where layers of history overlap, partially fade, and are carefully revealed. Her practice unfolds as an ethnofictional archive of an imagined Mazonian culture – a speculative system of knowledge stretched between research and fiction, document and myth. Yet within this imagined system, one repeatedly encounters traces of concealment. The Mazonian figures seem to operate underground, at the edges of visibility, as if forced to withdraw from official history into hidden chambers, forests, tunnels, improvised shelters, or rituals performed out of sight. The exhibition's title, *Secret Meeting*, evokes precisely this condition: the sense of arriving too late, of encountering only fragments after the gathering has already dispersed.

What remains are traces difficult to fully decode. Fragments of ornament, recurring vegetal motifs, ritual objects, partial gestures, bodily alignments, enigmatic textiles. Certain signs suggest systems of communication or collective practices whose meanings can no longer be fully reconstructed. In some narratives surrounding the imagined Mazonian culture, women are said to communicate telepathically through woven wigs or hair structures; elsewhere, communal rituals revolve around the separation of grain from chaff, repetitive agricultural gestures transformed into coded acts of solidarity. These stories hover between archaeological hypothesis, folklore, fantasy, and rumor. They cannot be verified, yet they continue to generate a powerful sense of proximity – as if something had taken place here, something collective and secretive, whose atmosphere still lingers within the objects.

The process of uncovering in the conservation of, for example, wall decorations requires both precision and intuition. A scalpel or solvent is guided along nearly invisible boundaries, revealing fragments of pattern: vegetal scrolls, geometric arrangements, repetitive ornamental rhythms. Rarely does the whole return. Instead, there are broken sequences, displacements, islands of form that only briefly cohere into something recognizable. The conservator decides where to stop, what to leave in shadow, what to complete. Each uncovering becomes an interpretation – a tension between what is materially present and what is imagined, but also a situation unfolding in time, demanding constant recalibration of attention. In *Secret Meeting*, this logic expands further: what is uncovered are not stable narratives, but residues of possible relations, incomplete choreographies, signals exchanged between figures we can no longer fully access.

In Woronowicz's paintings, a similar mechanism is transposed into the field of painting itself. Compositions often organize into bands – horizontal or diagonal – recalling exposed fragments of decoration, as if different layers of time had been brought into proximity without fully reconciling. Ornament no longer serves a decorative function; it operates as a carrier of memory. Recurring motifs – entangled bodies, vegetal forms, hybrid beings – arrange themselves into rhythmic sequences that suggest a larger structure, one that remains only partially accessible. Visual threads break off, merge, and split. The image does not depict an uncovering – it is one, a situation in which something emerges only to slip away again.

Across many works, irregular, thickening patches appear – concentrations of paint that form shapes resembling exposed fragments of ornament. They are neither background nor figure.

They function as traces of a process: sites where something has been brought to light, yet not fully recognized, suspended between appearance and disappearance. Their soft, diffused edges evoke both dissolution and the persistence of structure. They form fragmentary arrangements that seem to belong to a larger whole, yet never resolve into it. In this sense, they act as uncoverings – revealing rhythm without its full articulation, leaving space for what may still take shape in the act of looking.

This logic finds its material continuation in textile. Woronowicz approaches it as a parallel system of inscription – a space where ornament is not painted but woven. The tapestries, developed from her paintings, do not replicate them but transform them: translating fluid painterly matter into the structure of fiber. Motifs become denser, embedded in the rhythm of repeated gesture, one that requires time and persistence. What in painting remained diffuse acquires weight and continuity, without losing its ambiguity. Pattern holds through repetition, yet never fully stabilizes.

This trajectory extends further into performative work. Costumes created in collaboration with Halo Labels – inspired by the imagined Mazonian culture – function as moving ornaments, forms that can be worn and activated in space. Drawing on rural practices of labor, ritual, and communal life, they introduce a bodily and collective dimension. Ornament ceases to be pattern; it becomes gesture, action, relation – something that unfolds between bodies and materials. Painting, textile, and body interweave into a single process that does not so much represent as take place.

In this sense, Woronowicz's painting resonates with a Northern mode of seeing, in which light does not define form but disperses it. Diffuse, humid, indirect – it operates as a medium of memory, continuously shifting what becomes visible. Her palette of muted greens, greys, and pale ochres produces an image filtered through time. Figures are not firmly placed within space; they emerge from it, as if belonging to its very structure and simultaneously shaping it.

Yet this is not a return to the past. Woronowicz constructs a transhistorical system – a world governed by its own mythology, rituals, and narrative logic, where folklore intersects with contemporary speculation. The 'Mazonian culture', spanning from the 6th to the 17th century, functions as a living fiction: an expanding universe that accumulates images, artifacts, and stories. In this sense, her practice approaches the logic of role-playing games, where worlds are built from fragments, rules, and shared acts of imagination. Each work operates as an element within this system – a relic, a record, a point of entry that activates further possible trajectories.

The exhibition can thus be read as a field of discoveries: a constellation of objects that appear unearthed, yet lack a fixed origin. Recurring motifs function like partially revealed ornaments – suggesting a whole that cannot be fully reconstructed. What we see is not a finished image, but a moment of its unfolding, one that may shift elsewhere at any time.

Imagination plays a crucial role here. In conservation, a missing fragment must be conceived in order to be restored. In Woronowicz's practice, history undergoes a similar operation. The question is not what existed, but what might have existed – and how these possibilities continue to shape our perception of the present. By constructing 'alternative documents of memory and knowledge', the artist presents history as an open structure, subject to displacement and reinterpretation.

To look at these works is to participate in a process of uncovering. Yet what emerges never fully stabilizes into knowledge. At this stage, history cannot be reconstructed in its entirety; only fragments, residues, and speculative connections remain. Gestures survive without explanation, ornaments without complete systems, objects without certainty of use. But perhaps this partiality is precisely what gives these works their charge. Like hidden signs or unfinished rituals, they continue to generate tension, fascination, and a peculiar sense of proximity. Each revealed form carries within it the trace of what still remains hidden – and the unsettling possibility that the secret meeting has only just ended, moments before our arrival.

Text: Jagna Lewandowska