

## ART REVIEW

# Wendy Artin's 'Flesh and Stone' breathes new life into sculptures

The Rome-based, Boston-born artist paints both live models and inanimate ones in her show at Gurari Collections.

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated December 20, 2022, 12:32 p.m.



Wendy Artin, "Panatheniac Procession," 2022, watercolor painting WENDY ARTIN

Watercolor is a capricious medium — blotchy, fast drying, hard to control. Boston-born artist [Wendy Artin](#), who lives in Rome, handles it brilliantly.

Artin is an old-school figure painter. Her work, like that of [Michelangelo](#) or [Rodin](#), celebrates the body as an expressive vessel for the soul.

It's a lovely contradiction, then, that she depicts both live models and sculptural ones. Her subjects in "Flesh and Stone" at Gurari Collections include a [Parthenon frieze](#)

housed at the Louvre Museum and an 18th-century Icarus, by [Paul-Ambroise Slodtz](#), also from the Louvre collection. In watercolor, these figures look no less fleshly than the people she paints.

“Panatheniac Procession,” her view of the Parthenon frieze, is epic in size for a watercolor at more than 7 feet across and 3½ feet high. She captures fine details of fingers, faces, and togas with uncanny precision. But up close, drips and breaths of paint create an aura of dissolution, and an enduring relic of Western civilization becomes a vaporous figment.

Notably, Artin does not map out her work with underdrawing. Rather, she makes each piece an improvisational performance. In “Andrea Eyes Shut,” the live model’s chiseled torso seems still as marble, but his hips soften; one shoulder dissolves; his dark hair drifts in a halo echoed by shadows. Every slouch and stretch Artin portrays suggests an internal world.



Wendy Artin, "Federica Curl," 2022, watercolor painting WENDY ARTIN

In “Federica Curl,” the model takes a yoga-like pose, seeming to tumble from a confrontation with light. Brilliant patches gleam on forearm, leg, and shoulder. But the paint sinks into the paper in a luscious fuzz along her back; it puddles to one side of her thigh. There’s a conjuring in these watercolors reminiscent of the momentary radiance of sunlight on water.



Wendy Artin, "Icarus," 2022, watercolor painting WENDY ARTIN

“Icarus” is already imbued with the tale of a dream dissolved, a young man fallen on his broken wings. Razor-sharp edges of light and shadow delineate eyelid, ear, and nostril. They make the picture vivid from afar, but scrutiny of much of the work reveals a drifting haze, one that seems impossible to control.

How does Artin so splendidly paint muscle and bone with mist, shadows, and the occasional puddle? She knows when and how to let go, trusting watercolor’s caprices to capture the fog of creation, from which flesh and stone come ... and go.

## **WENDY ARTIN: FLESH AND STONE**

At Gurari Collections, 460 Harrison Ave., through Jan. 20. 617-367-9800,  
[www.gurari.com](http://www.gurari.com)

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