

JULY 24, 2025 | ARTS

TEN'S TO SEE: 'YULIA MAHR: THE CHURCH OF OUR BECOMING' AT DOVER STREET MARKET PARIS

BY EMILY PHILLIPS

British-Hungarian artist Yulia Mahr dissolves boundaries; in her work, between disciplines, bodies and worlds, and in the way she articulates herself, she softens the edges of identity into something more fluid, shared and unresolved. Weaving human narratives of



transformation, identity and interconnection through thermographic portraiture and classical form, she offers a new vision of what beauty – and humanity – can be. That vision is at the heart of her latest exhibition. Now on view in the Courtyard at [Dover Street Market Paris](#), Mahr's *The Church of Our Becoming* unfurls like a radical liturgy of the body, with ghostly, glowing imagery on every wall.

Shot with a thermal camera – often reserved for military use to detect the heat signatures of people crossing borders and which Mahr has been using since 2010 – *The Church of Our Becoming* deals with ideals of the human form in Greek statuary specifically, reclaiming and reimagining the classical canon. Mahr captures the radiance of real human bodies – trans, non-binary, fluid or otherwise – challenging long-held assumptions about gender, form and power. Seeing that physical energy as the red thread through which all people are connected, and as a visualisation of human equality as opposed to difference or categorisation, Mahr's portraits ask us to confront what we feel, rather than what we see and embrace a vision of “endless becoming”.

“Greek sculptors invented muscle groups to idealise men or sculpted demure women into passivity and we're still haunted by those ideals today in everything from fashion to advertising,” says Mahr. “This work draws its force not from confrontation, but from intimacy. It presents classical form as a story we can rewrite – together and differently. Here is beauty and it happens when we no longer take gender or identity as givens.”



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The Church of Our Becoming, 2025, Yulia Mahr

Across 13 monumental portraits – each standing up to three and a half meters tall – Mahr creates a new pantheon. Positioned along the pillars of Dover Street Market Paris, the courtyard becomes a kind of contemplative passageway wherein viewers can engage with the work on an intimate scale.

Mahr began working with thermal cameras fifteen years ago, initially drawn to their association with surveillance and control. “I became obsessed with the idea that these tools of oppression and surveillance could be used to create something beautiful and life-affirming instead,” she says. Mapping heat instead of light, the cameras strip away surface detail and offer something closer to an emotional register – one that sees us all as equal, embodied energy. “I adore the way they [thermal cameras] call into question everything we have been taught about how to read an image, compelling us to look again. And how in picking up heat patterns, rather than surface details, they allow us to look below the surface at our commonality: at the body as heat, as energy, as shared animal fact. In the face of this, the equality I continually advocate for becomes scientifically an unquestionable fact.”

Inspired by a resurgence of global conservatism and the narrowing definitions of gender and womanhood, Mahr began this project as both a personal and political response. But things really kicked into gear for her when, in April, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the definition of “woman” is reliant on “biological sex”. “I had the opposite reaction to those celebrating the ruling. I felt appalled by it. And concerned. It seems to me to be the past screaming at the face of the future,” she says. “As someone who has faced a lifetime of sexism, all I want to do is open up the definition of womanhood, and to advocate for a broad acceptance of humans, rather than to close it down.”



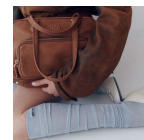
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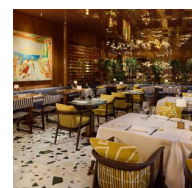


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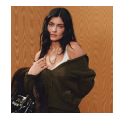
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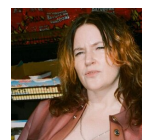
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The Church of Our Becoming, 2025, Yulia Mahr

Working in slow, intimate sessions with her sitters – often sharing stories, meals and moments of vulnerability – Mahr brings a portraitist’s patience to each image, a practice she developed during her years working with ethnography. The thermal camera is not designed for this kind of work, so poses are deliberate, composed and collaborative. Inspired by the heroic musculature of classical sculpture, she uses those references only to unravel them. “I’m deliberately breaking with Greek notions of balance,” she notes. “Or leaning into them just to subvert them.”

The installation at Dover Street Market Paris coincides with the Max Richter x Comme des Garçons Parfums collaboration, for which Mahr also created the artwork for the fragrance box. While developed independently, the scent and the images emerge in tandem, forming a kind of sensory diptych. “My series [*The Church of Our Becoming*] is not inspired by the perfume or directly connected with it, but what we loved was that I was developing this work at the same time as Max was developing the perfume, and the osmotic process this gave rise to. Two parallel art projects somehow strengthening each other,” says Mahr.

As a result, *The Church of Our Becoming* stands not only as a powerful visual experience, but also a manifesto of radical empathy. Like the scent it shares a debut with, the installation is

layered, ephemeral and deeply felt – a call to feel more, not less.

Photography courtesy of Yulia Mahr.

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Yulia Mahr photographed by Lesley Lau in her studio

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