

Metamorfosi del Sacro by Teodora Axente

At Museo di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena



Teodora Axente, *The Deer is Sleeping*, 2025, oil on canvas, 80 x 65.5 cm

November 14, 2025 – January 11, 2026

Curated by Riccardo Freddo and Michela Eremita

Based on an idea by Cristiano Leone

Teodora Axente's first institutional solo exhibition, showcasing one of the most compelling voices in contemporary European painting, is a show entirely conceived for Santa Maria della Scala.

The Museum Santa Maria della Scala in Siena will host **Metamorfosi del Sacro** from November 14, 2025, to January 11, 2026. This marks the first institutional solo exhibition of Romanian artist Teodora Axente, one of the most distinguished voices in contemporary European painting.

The exhibition is radically site-specific and originates from an idea by the Foundation's President, Cristiano Leone, aiming not only to juxtapose contemporary art with historical heritage but also to enhance the latter through projects conceived specifically for the museum complex. The show is realized in collaboration with Rosenfeld Gallery, London, and curated by Riccardo Freddo and Michela Eremita.

Metamorfosi del Sacro comprises 25 works created entirely for Santa Maria della Scala, offering a journey that bridges centuries and sensibilities. In Axente's vision, relics become evoked presences, and the spiritual dimension is renewed through hybrid imagery.

Once a hospital and place of refuge for pilgrims, Santa Maria della Scala houses unique treasures such as Vecchietta's frescoes (Lorenzo di Pietro, 1410–1480), the Veil of the Virgin, the Nail of the Cross, and relics from Constantinople. Axente's practice engages with this rich tapestry of signs, transforming the museum's spiritual and material heritage into an imaginative atlas.

Immersed in the museum, where she spent time studying and observing its wonders, Axente creates her painted installations, intertwining memories with frescoes, symbols, and liturgical objects to form a visionary pictorial language. At the heart of the exhibition is the theme of metamorphosis: birth, dissolution, and elevation, where the body becomes a fragile and sacred space, an incubator of the soul and an instrument of healing, while everything bears traces of the passage from the earthly to the divine.

Still lifes incorporate objects once used in the hospital, such as bowls, bandages, containers, and medical instruments, which become secular relics and evidence of physical and spiritual care. Insects, cocoons, lilies, ladders, and chalices serve as archetypes of transformation, evoking the possibility of transfiguration. Alongside these motifs, the artist integrates elements inspired by the museum's painted architecture. Relics assume symbolic presence within her compositions, and the sacredness of the site intertwines with its original function of care and hospitality.

In *Still Life with Lilies* (2025), a still life of sacred relics acquired by the Empress of Constantinople is centred around the Nail of the Cross of Christ, transformed into the luminous focal point of the composition. In *The Ladder* (2025), Axente reinterprets Vecchietta's frescoes, recomposing them into a ladder suspended between earth and sky. In *Restoring the World* (2025), an angelic young girl holds a vial containing Christ's blood, both fragile and powerful, as a promise of rebirth.

The exhibition opening on November 13, 2025, at 6:00 pm will feature the performance *In the Gaze of Teodora Axente* with Alessandra Cristiani, Jacopo Giarda, and live music by the jazz trio directed by Silvia Bolognesi alongside two students from the Siena Jazz Academy, as part of the XENOS performance festival (Siena, Santa Maria della Scala, November 13–16, 2025), under the artistic direction of Anna Lea Antolini.

Teodora Axente (b. 1984, Sibiu)

Winner of the Grand Prize at the 3rd Frissiras Award for European Painting and the Essl Art Award, Axente was selected by Uwe Goldenstein for the catalog *Preparing for Darkness. A New Movement in Contemporary Painting*. Already internationally recognized through exhibitions at MoCA Boulder (Colorado), the Museum of Art in Cluj-Napoca, and the Hugo Voeten Art Centre, her work arrives in Siena as a testament to how contemporary art can open temporal gateways into the heart of Italian history and heritage.