

## **THE RETURN OF THE GREAT GODDESS**

**The Art of Irene Caesar as an attempt to restore the lost balance between the masculine and feminine divine principles.**

**By Ekaterina Dais**

The series of artworks by the Russian-American artist Irene Caesar "The New History of Ideas in Pictures" proclaims its own view on the masculine and feminine, sacred and profane, unique and archetypal.

In which times does Caesar work? First of all, our times can be characterized as breaking down the cultural code of the Euro-Atlantic civilization. Various cultural revolutions have occurred over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many are still occurring now, all being focused on the change of the masculine sacred dominant for the feminine one.

Let us clarify our thought. The Paleolithic religion had a balance between the God of the Heavens and the Goddess of the Earth. Later on, this situation changed. Various cults were competing with each other until, in one of the turn-around moments in the Euro-Atlantic civilization, the God of male gender won. As a result, a male trio complemented with the supplementary Virgin Mary became a standard of culture, dictating its attitude both to the pagan cults of The Earth Goddess and to the extraordinary women – as a rule, mutilating their fate.

The Christian Civilization is theologically masculine. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, everything again changed, due to the industrial revolution

(woman also can operate a machine), and the universal education of women. The 20<sup>th</sup> century experiences such revolutions unconnected with each other from the first glance as the sexual revolution (the liberation of the feminine emotions), the anti-colonial revolution (the bearers of pagan cultures achieve independence), the hermetic revolution (the legalization of various esoteric practices); and the liberal sciences go through "the dimensional revolution." In the course of the latter, history and time lose their position to geography and space. Scientists are more and more interested in the locale as the philosophical category. Kenneth White formulates the notion of "geopolitics," and Igor Sid applies this term to cultural and myth-creating projects.

This long preamble was needed to express the following: we think that the creativity of Irene Caesar belongs to the so-called "Return of the Goddess Gea" – that is, to the actualization of the Feminine Divine Principle, which restores its balance with the Masculine Divine Principle. This process, which has started in the Euro-Atlantic civilization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is still going on.

What do we see in the art by Caesar? Let us look at some of her artworks. Here is *Madonna Liberated*– a woman dressed like Virgin Mary holds an infant, but it is an infant-girl instead of an infant-boy. In some variants of this artwork, there is a pseudo fig's leaf between the legs of an infant, which says "girl." Once, Rene Magritte put a sign beneath the image of a pipe: "This is not a pipe." Now Irene Caesar puts a sign "This is a girl" beneath the expected depiction of the infant Jesus. *Madonna Liberated* is a young female goddess. Consequently, we are expecting in the art by Caesar some other confirmations of the return and presence of the Great Goddess. And here they are.

A woman in a white boxer's tee-short with the sign "girl" tramples with her foot on a white box with a sign "bread." She is standing next to similar boxes with signs "water," "salt," "wine," "milk," "meat" and "cheese." On one side, this is simply a set of goods sold in a grocery store. On the other, this woman has the sign on her chest, which is identical to the sign on the body of an infant in *Madonna Liberated*, and, so, she is identical to Jesus Christ who turns water into wine, calls his apostles the salt of the earth, and feeds starving people with loafs of bread. This artwork is called *Modern Still Life* – but for housewives who hate their everyday tiresome visits to grocery stores, this is rather a modern Crucifixion.

In the *Ritual of Flowers*, a sad girl wrapped into a black towel, is throwing down from her stretched up arm a bouquet of flowers, consisting of two red roses, and a third rose without petals. The title of the artwork has connotations of death. In the similar way, the funeral homes in Russia for a long time were called euphemistically "the bureaus of ritual services." The mourning color of a heroine's garment; her sad face; the even, that is, sacrificed to the dead, number of roses with petals; and the overall number of flowers; the fallen petals on the third rose as the symbol of the fleeing life – all this makes us think that this artwork refers to the world of the dead.

Similar to Persephone stolen in the moment when she has been gathering flowers on a field, this girl is mourning her youth and has a foreboding of her death. The word "ritual" used by the artist -- and precisely the ritual of flowers -- reveals its connections with the ancient myth about the girl forced to descend to the world of the dead, but be-

ing still capable of return, of resurrection by the efforts of her mother. Persephone, this pagan analog of Jesus Christ, looks at us from this artwork by Irene Caesar.

Further on, being paired, undoubtedly, to this image is the artwork *Waning Flowers* (and Caesar has many unnamed diptychs in her body of work). Here, the unmistakable play between the meaning of waning flowers and the meaning of waning female beauty sharply contrasts with the content of the artwork. In front of us is a nude woman, smelling a white rose without leaves and thorns. This is a nude rose. On her knees, a woman holds a small sheaf of wheatears; they are also lying on the floor. Sitting on a white cube that resembles the boxes with signs in the artwork *Modern Still Life*, this lady is no less no more than the analogue of the mourning Demeter. The traditional iconography of the latter includes in itself the imagery of the goddess sitting on the basket; one of her attributes is the sheaf of wheatears. According to the author's assertion, the artwork has the second, apocryphal name *Persephone*. Based on this identification of the mother Demeter with the daughter Persephone, we can state that the art of Caesar defines The Divine Pair alternative to the Christian Trinity and ascending to the Hellenistic Mysteries. And here, Caesar is undoubtedly following in the steps of Salvador Dali who presents to us the ancient goddess as a simple modern woman.

We are speaking of Dali's well-known painting "*Dream Caused by the Fly of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening.*" To our understanding, the central meaning of the composition concentrates on two symbols of faithfulness: as is known, a bee in the Ancient Egypt and pomegranate in the Ancient Greece were identical in

their symbolic meaning. Moreover, the ability of pomegranate to strengthen marital faithfulness is reflected in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, where a Czar of the Underworld (Hades) gives to his spouse a seed of pomegranate to eat. After eating it, Persephone, though liberated by her mother from the depths of darkness and night, is forced to return every year to the Underworld, so strong is the magical enchanting powers of pomegranate. The image of Fish, which was in the antiquity an attribute of many hypostases of the Great Goddess, reminds us still of initiation, being, in this case, the modality of devouring the tiger and letting the tiger out (the tiger being the symbol of passion). In the ancient times, Fish that devoured man had symbolized the Kingdom of the Dead, in which man was capable of a radical change. Tiger also is one of animals devoted to Dionysius who, according to the Orphic Mysteries, was the son of Persephone. The procession at the Hellenistic Mysteries was carrying the branches devoted to Dionysius.

That is, in front of us is Persephone – the ideal initiated, surrounded by symbols referring to the ancient myth: The Fish as The Great Goddess; The Tiger-Dionysius; The Pomegranate as the symbol of faithfulness; and The Bee bringing the honey of love.

The other development, important for the Return of the Great Goddess in the art by Irene Caesar, brings us to the Templars. In this context, we will point to two artworks: The Portrait of Edmund Voyer wrapped in a metal net as a fish in scales, and *Tribute to Slavery*. Edmund Voyer is a Templar Prior in New York, according to the title of the artwork. His piercing glance makes us recall not only the magical abilities of the Knights Templar, immortalized in legends, but also, of course, of

the Grand Master Jacques de Molay burnt at the stake on April 13<sup>th</sup> 1307. Seemingly, it was such a long time ago...

In *Tribute to Slavery*, an aged African-American woman with a big body, like a Paleontological Venus, is kissing a white porcelain doll. The colours of her clothes – blue and red – remind us not only of the colour gamut of the artwork *Madonna Liberated*, but of the iconography of the Virgin Mary, in general. The dark skin colour of this Madonna with an infant (not the first who is a Madonna with the infant of female gender in the artworks by Irene Caesar) brings to mind “Black Madonnas” – the sculptures spread in Europe of 13-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The skin colour of these sacred objects differed from slightly olive to ebony; and the materials they were made from were also different: wood, bronze, and stone.

According to one of the versions, The Templars have brought Black Madonnas from their Crusades, and Madonna became black because she represented the dark-skinned Goddess of the Earth – Isis with the infant Horus in her arms.

Actualizing the forgotten myths and representing in her art the Great Mother Goddess, Irene Caesar brings into art photography the secrets of the Ancient Mysteries of Isis and Osiris, Demeter and Persephone. And in our times, the same flash of light illuminates the models of Irene Caesar, as the flash of light that was seen by the mystics entering the secret sanctuary of the Goddess of the Night, who gives knowledge.