

An abstract painting featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes in vibrant red, pink, and blue. The composition is dominated by large, swirling, organic shapes that create a sense of movement and depth. The colors are layered and blended, with some areas showing more saturated reds and others transitioning into soft pinks and blues. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity.

# Mira Dancy Madonna Undone



## Mira Dancy and Victoria Cheong

### The Autonomous Goddess and *Madonna Undone* An Astrological Perspective

IN SEPTEMBER 2022, Mira Dancy walked me through her exhibition at Night Gallery. I had cast her natal chart and we talked about its contents in relation to her artistic process as well as some of the themes of the show. Through the symbolic language of astrology, we discovered new inroads to the archetypal feminine, the complicated mother, and the autonomous goddess. We found connections to mythology, the elements, different kinds of time, and how we make decisions in our art and in our lives. Below is an excerpt from our conversation along with a bit of astrological interpretation.

**VICTORIA CHEONG** There's a word that is used sometimes to describe the planetary symbols of astrology: multivalent. I feel like there is a multivalence in these paintings.

**MIRA DANCY** A kind of soft symbology that lets you in from any side, any shape, or color, I hope. I can see this as a way that painting and astrology relate—an openness to dig between fixed symbols or forms to find new energy. When I start a painting, I think about the sky, this arc above us, and the way the stars move across it. It's this slow moving image, changing night to night...sometimes one painting will begin on the heels of another and they will share some structure or shape, but both the meaning and the image are susceptible to shifts, or a kind of seismic crumbling underfoot. I want the images to be flexible in how they take on meaning.

**VC** There's this conceptualization of movement that's almost...

**MD** ...Celestial, in the way that things are at different speeds. So something in the background going slower and something closer moving faster. I think of certain parts of the painting as slowing down time... sometimes an eye or a geometric knot will do this, but then a swath of color or a drip will speed it back up.

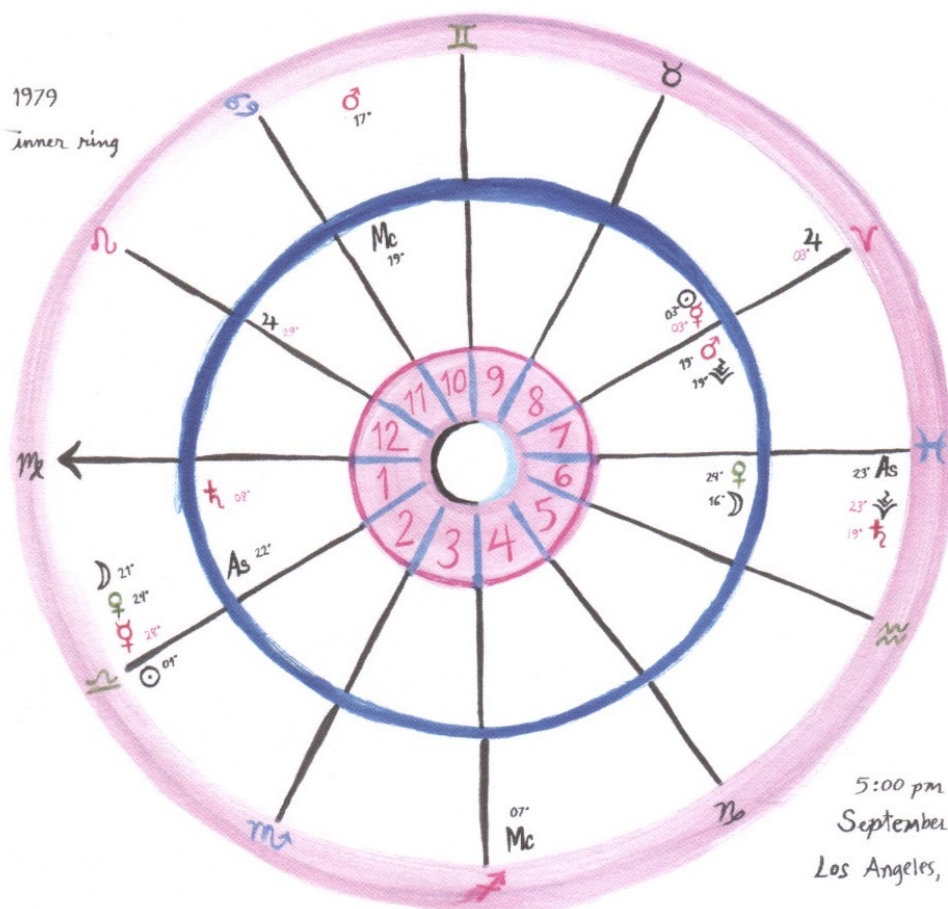
**VC** I love that. I mean that is just overwhelmingly cosmic. [With consideration to the main concepts of the exhibition] When I think about "mother" or "femininity," I would look to Venus or the Moon. But you're a Virgo rising, a sign ruled by Mercury. Virgo is very connected to the theme of the "autonomous woman." Part of the sign's associated symbolism is the Vestal Virgins, who were the keepers of the fire in ancient Rome. And they had a job that was keeping the flame. And so, they were never married, and they were allowed to be autonomous. And they were respected and revered in society. They were these respected autonomous women with jobs and they also performed sacred sexual rituals.

**MD** Interesting. This idea of recognizing bodies for their ability to channel, to carry messages from sources deep inside or outside the self, is one I hold close. I want to imagine subjects with alternate forms of autonomy. While I was making these paintings, I was imagining inscribing images of a "Madonna who says No," or a "Madonna who doesn't Mother" into the timeline... kind of like imagining a Vestal Virgin pushed to her limit and extinguishing the flame.

**VC** Virgo is also one of the Earth signs and there's something ultimately earthly about painting.



6:09 pm  
 March 24, 1979  
 Bromley, UK inner ring



5:00 pm  
 September 24, 2022  
 Los Angeles, USA outer ring

**MD** Yes, so close to the source. It's just dirt... colored dirt... That's partly how I landed on including the sand elements in this show. I wanted to tease out this connection between gesture and source. Wanting to disintegrate the plasticity of the paint into...

**VC** It's kind of like original material. It's rock.

**MD** Granular. And then it's also like time. Sand is earth and time.

**VC** Virgo is a mutable earth sign... that which can shapeshift...and ruled by Mercury. Your Mercury is right next to your Sun in Aries in what we call cazimi. The image with cazimi is that Mercury is in sacred council with the Sun. The two planets are in this chamber of commiserating, and Mercury, as the messenger, is receiving information from the Sun to disseminate onward in time.

**MD** So much of my relationship to painting has been characterized by this sense of psychic, secret

messages... always feeling like, and especially right now, that a certain retreat or withdrawal is necessary to receive and to process.

**VC** Astrologers say that when Mercury is cazimi it's a great time to meditate. It's this kind of contemplative, secret retreat. The Sun symbolically relates to intense and singular spiritual knowledge. Mercury is thought to be able to travel into the Underworld and come back, and to deliver messages back and forth.

**MD** Wow. That's why I love paintings—there's this sense of them operating out of time, holding the past, present, and future in a strange union. And the message isn't static over time—it changes even as the image remains fixed.

**VC** There's so much connection there...you're also not just an Aries Sun...you have a Mercurial Sun, you have a solar Mercury. They're really in cahoots in this very sacred way.

**MIRA DANCY IS A VIRGO RISING** with Mercury cazimi in Aries.

Venus, the goddess of love, beauty, justice, and the arts, is located in the air sign of Aquarius. In this place, Venus is a future-thinking goddess, one who rejects the status quo and is attracted to unconventional and provocative ideas and aesthetics.

Mars, the fiery ruler of her Aries Sun sign, is in a conjunction with the asteroid Vesta. Vesta is the goddess of the hearth fire and presides over moral issues around sexuality, including the Madonna-whore dichotomy, sisterhood, and teachings around the notion of renewing virginity.\*

Mira's chart indicates a deconstructive Mercurial visionary. Her art is likely to be concerned with collective issues (a preoccupation of Venus in Aquarius). Her motivations are governed by Mars and Vesta in combustible combination—the warrior and the goddess of eternal flame are tempered, however, by being in the compassionate water sign of Pisces.

The day that *Madonna Undone* opened at Night Gallery, the Moon, Venus, and Mercury were gathered in Virgo, conjunct Mira's ascendant; a lot of energy was convening in the same area of the sky that was rising on the Eastern horizon at the moment of her birth. The Sun had just entered Libra, the airy, intellectual temple of Venus, symbolized by the scales of justice and marking a turning point in the solar year wherein light and dark are balanced.

Transiting Jupiter was conjunct Mira's Mercury cazimi, amplifying her messages and blessing them with wisdom. Catalyzing Mars was about to cross her natal Midheaven—the pinnacle of her chart and a sensitive point that signifies one's public work in the world.

As in Mira's natal chart, Vesta is prominent in the chart of the opening, rising on the ascendent degree and conjunct Mira's natal Venus in Aquarius. Astrologers read a planetary symbol on the ascendant as an important omen connected to the identity of that which is coming into being.

\*Interpretations on the asteroid Vesta come from the work of mythic-archetypal astrologer Demetra George.