

INMAN GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 3, 2017

Inman Gallery is pleased to present
the exhibition:

STORIES TOLD

July 7 – September 9, 2017

Opening Reception:
Friday, July 7, 6 – 8 pm

Inman Gallery is pleased to present **STORIES TOLD**, an exhibition of eleven paintings by contemporary female artists, on view in the Main Gallery. The exhibition opens Friday, July 7, with a reception from 6 to 8 pm, and will continue through September 9, 2017.

The exhibition features paintings by Mequitta Ahuja, Firelei Báez, Kaye Donachie, Angela Fraleigh, Hope Gangloff, Vera Iliatova, Becky Kolsrud, Rosa Loy, and Sarah McEneaney. These nine artists' practices lie at the intersection of painting, feminism and representation. They are invested in telling their own histories, and those of the women, known and unknown, whose stories they also tell. As inheritors of second- and third-wave feminism, these artists rely on a blend of performance, self-projection and the reshaping of tropes found in traditional painting in the service of what is today a complex contemporary moment around women's bodies and identities.

All of the works in the exhibition sample narrative structures from the history of painting and combine them with contemporary attitudes towards gender and bodily autonomy. Angela Fraleigh's *Once you have tasted flight you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward* (2016) presents women plucked from Jacob Jordaens' *The Rest of Diana* (c. 1645-55). In Fraleigh's retelling, the lustful male woodland creatures surrounding her are absent, and the scene is cropped to focus on the grouping of Diana recounting the hunt to her nymphs. The airy background is replaced with heavily lined elements from Japanese prints of the Edo period. As Fraleigh notes, "The women are playing out narratives, but importantly, most are acting as storytellers.... For example, and this is subtle, I used Japanese prints not only for their content, but also as a reference to the first novel ever written, which as far as we know is *The Tale of Genji* written by Murasaki Shikibu, a woman. And in another, Diana tells a story to her nymphs after the hunt, etc. For me, collapsing all of these together—the fragments, remnants, figures—helps weave together the power of women's words."¹



Angela Fraleigh, *Once you have tasted flight you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward*, 2016
oil, acrylic and marker on canvas, 90 x 66 inches

¹ Dunbar, Elizabeth. *Angela Fraleigh: Between Tongue & Teeth*. Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 2016. 17.

If groups of women together are potentially conspiratorial or plotting, then they can also be self-sufficient and resilient. The relationships at play in Rosa Loy's *Vermittlung* and Vera Iliatova's *Aure Multifoliate* imply a metaphorical multiplication of the self in the service of unknown aims. Iliatova's nine women are at once together and alone, intimate, wholly self-sufficient, and isolated from one another. They are relegated to a small corner in a grassy landscape; some are comforting each other by embracing, and others are standing alone in shock, grappling with a fact or horror with which they have been faced.



Rosa Loy, *Verbunden*, 2012
casein on paper, 23.6 x 17.8 in
courtesy McClain Gallery, Houston

In Loy's *Vermittlung* and *Verbunden*, the individual is either multiplied or merged with another. Surreal, fairytale-like scenes propose an other-worldly space that is very real, with recognizable fashions and haircuts, and a healthy dose of feminist self-reliance. *Vermittlung* translates to "mediation"—is this self-mediation between two halves? In this work, the two women are entwined as a plant-like creature reaches out to the standing woman. While *Vermittlung* explores the self in clear metaphors, *Verbunden* (German for "connected") is more opaque. Reminiscent of a slice from an illuminated manuscript, the painting is organized around one woman who is cradled by a small tree. She is pulling the forest floor up over her leg, smiling to herself. A strong shadow grounds her evermore firmly to the bottom of the picture plane, but there is no clue as to her broader place, keeping her intimate moment of connectedness focused in an environment of self-sufficiency and satisfaction.

Similarly, Hope Gangloff portrays the psychic landscape of a woman at work. How to achieve this without falling into the trap of creating a passive subject, available for projecting desire? Hope Gangloff's *Starlee Kine – Writer's Kitchen* (2016) embodies an active portrait within a charged and restricted space. Within the Alice Neel-like style, there is a sense of warm claustrophobia, and an uneven quality of tipping forward. The well-known radio producer and writer sits amid a rushing swirl of color. As an artist painting a cultural figure such as Kine, Gangloff depicts a female-centered milieu of work and thought.

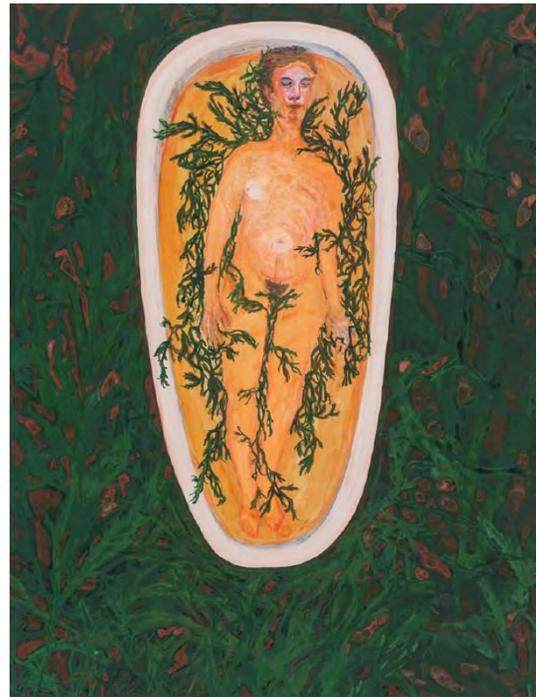
Mequitta Ahuja's painting, *Charm* (2017), draws upon the feminist artist practice of layering performance, photography and self-creation. Ahuja photographs herself as the sitter, considering these sessions as performances, then paints from the photographs, adding elements to the painting to create what she terms her "automythography." For Ahuja, this term combines her lived individual experience with her broader cultural heritages.² Drawing upon her African-American and South Asian Indian backgrounds, Ahuja is both sitter and author, a paradoxical vessel for many versions of herself. She is vulnerable in a slip or nightgown, yet ensconced by a type of evening wrap, which drapes elegantly around her arms.

² "Artist's Statement - Mequitta Ahuja". Automythography. Retrieved 2017-06-18.

As bodies can be a “screen” for filtering and reflecting assumptions about women, so too can images of nature project past metaphors and assumptions. In nearly all works in the exhibition, plants and flowers function as characters unto themselves. In Vera Ilitavova’s *Aure Multifoliata* (2015), the oversized flowers obscure our view of the women in the scene; the flowers could easily replace the women as protagonists in the work. In both Ahuja’s and McEneaney’s work, the vegetation surrounds and supports.

While Ahuja grounds us in the reality of her unwavering self-portraits, Firelei Báez abstracts concepts of the female “self” to project the perceptions of the female body through a dialectical approach. As a woman of Dominican and Haitian descent, Báez challenges histories of the oppressed by presenting bodies that travel through time and space, accumulating or discarding meaning along the way. The form in Báez’s *The Right to Opacity* (2013) is art-historically reminiscent of the tiny, 27,000-year-old “Venus of Willendorf” sculpture, but for the artist it is more specifically a reference to the South African-born historical figure Sarah Baartman, better known as the Hottentot Venus. In 1810 Baartman was taken to London and put on display under the stage name Hottentot Venus because she had what was then called “steatopygia”, a condition that results in extremely protuberant buttocks due to a build-up of fat. Báez notes that “as a woman of color from the Caribbean, who is constantly told of a representation without a history, the Hottentot Venus’ treatment was [for me] always a touchstone when thinking of transnational female identity. As a figure that exists between many countries, the transnational body takes on a new meaning, both real and projected.”³ In Báez’s treatment, the figure is imbued with vibrant color, palm leaves, and chain-like ropes draping down from its torso. The head is shrouded replaced by palm fronds, and the body is clouded by fruit-like orbs. The typically “important” aspects of the female body (hips and breasts) disappear within the body’s relationships to history and its own stereotypes (fertility and giver of life).

Sarah McEneaney’s diaristic paintings, on the other hand, detail her lived experiences. *Kilcullen’s Enniscrone* (2016) is a small portrait of the artist in a bath of seaweed. The title references a bath house, Kilcullen’s, in Enniscrone, Ireland. Although we are voyeurs in a private moment of self-care, the entirety of the bathroom is also available for inspection. Her sister’s head is visible, but her body is obscured in a steam box. This autobiographical narrative of two sisters, on a trip alone, allows the viewer to fully engage in a detailed and honest scene. A more focused work from the same series, *Seaweed Bath* (2016), renders a close-up view of the artist, floating in a bathtub above an all-over seaweed pattern. The artist’s mastectomy scar is on view, a sensitive and powerful clue to her broader life story.



Sara McEneaney, *Seaweed Bath*, 2013
acrylic on yupo paper mounted on wood
23 x 17-1/2 inches
courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, NY

³ Firelei Baez, e-mail message to Danielle Bourassa-Young, Gallery Wendi Norris, July 7, 2017.

Kaye Donachie's *Absence* (2013) and Becky Kolsrud's *Blue Eye/Red Eye* (2016) tell of the push and pull between beauty and intimacy. Donachie's painting is drawn from photographs of women from early 20th century cultural circles, a reappraisal of the way women were portrayed almost a century ago. Of her characters, she notes, "They have a really clear sense, when you look into them, of fashion, of beauty. Their life is like art. They dress in a particular way. They were very avant garde."⁴



Becky Kolsrud, *Blue Eye/Red Eye*, 2016
oil and pastel on canvas
24 x 20 inches
courtesy of JTT Gallery, NY

This unknown woman remains alone, hunched over, with her hands on the sides of her face in a moment of sorrow. Soft blues, pillowy greys, yellows and purples render the portrait intensely intimate. Serenely beautiful, with a vague sense of dread, they provide us limited access to this woman's inner self.

Kolsrud's *Blue Eye/Red Eye* (2016) uses expressive color and a gate-like pattern to hinder full access to what is otherwise a traditionally cropped portrait. She emerges from behind a screen, a blue smear overcomes one eye, and the red eye points to the smudge of red on her lips. Reminiscent of Hollywood-era portraits, the painting obscures traditional ideals of beauty and turns our attention toward her inner psyche.

The artists represented in STORIES TOLD explore their own histories and those of other known and unknown women, and they take up issues regarding women's bodies, their roles in society, and womanhood itself, as subjects for paintings. They also assert painting as a primary art form, one that continues to be a site of reinvention and capable of new forms of expression.

Inman Gallery is pleased to present these artists' work in dialogue, and we would like to thank Wendi Norris Gallery, Susan Inglett Gallery, McClain Gallery, Maureen Paley, Tibor de Nagy Gallery and JTT Gallery and the artists for the generous loans of the works for the exhibition.

For more information, please contact the gallery at (713) 526-7800 or at info@inmangallery.com.

⁴ Gavin, Francesca. "The Ephemeral Beauty of Kaye Donachie," *Beauty Papers*, 2017, Issue 3, 89.