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Jessie Makinson
Stay here while I get a curse

Lyles & King
21 Catherine Street

New York
Lower East Side

Oct 28th – Dec 11th



In her second solo exhibition at Lyles & King, “Stay here while I get a curse,” Jessie Makinson creates voluptuous scenes of intrigue and mythicism. Her work has quickly become more fulsome, even compared to a suite of 2019 paintings shown by the gallery last year. In large oil paintings on canvas, witchy and chimerical figures, covered in tattoos and foliage and stylized translucent fabrics and lace, erotically play, tease and conspire, whisper intrigues in a fantasy court.

As with her work at the Armory Show in September, some of the more interesting paintings here appear like details of larger tableaux. As in a Northern European Renaissance crucifixion scene, *A thorn to his foot* (all works 2021) shows gnarled feet in ghastly colors, though here they're seductively entangled. (All of Makinson's figures either are barefoot or their legs terminate as sexually charged high heels.) The colors in all of these paintings are sickly, with vibrant night fluorescence—bright, acidic colors against soft, warm and dark fields, rendered complexly and hazily on tidy surfaces.

The figures bear creaturely features. Many have tails trailing from their derrieres, presumably grown, but perhaps a reference to a popular novelty sex toy. Skin tones range from the human to the chameleon: tiger stripes and cheetah print and cow piebald, green flesh veined with fuchsia, checkerboards. In a few paintings, such as the eponymous *Stay here while I get a curse* and *Another rascal comes*, a clawed hand slyly reaches from some hidden place outside the picture plane to tug on a character's tailpiece. Everyone in these scenes is alluring, and although most of the figures present as lustily femme, with curving hips and breasts, there are some men, with hypertrophied physiques and large phalluses, as in *Proceed daintily*—but even they seem androgynous.

Interspersed among these grotesques is a symbolically loaded bestiary, seemingly drawn from the history of European painting and beyond: butterflies, swine, hunting dogs and pheasants, horses. This is especially true in the largest and boldest

painting, *Try to get some sleep*, a stoned bacchanal triptych. Wine and smoke drift through a crowd gathered in a garden space that is equal parts M.C. Escher, Carlo Crivelli and Sascha Braunig. In the left and center panels are two decapitations—though perhaps not murders, as the disembodied still appear to be engaged in the activity around them. Both resemble depictions of Holofernes assassinated by Judith. Throughout her work, including this and *Come on, lets find another nightmare [sic]*, which is hung nearby, the suggestions of violence remain erotic. The victims, decollated or having their lesions fondled, appear unharmed, unsuffering and even basking, ecstatic.

The images here are suggestive but not exactly narrative—unless there is some untold story conceived by Makinson. Instead, they appear more like tarot cards arrayed on a table, with evocative signs that invite connections and activation. Far from being a domain of the ineffable and irrational, such symbolic systems can serve, according to a 2019 essay in *The New Yorker* by Christine Smallwood, as a means to open difficult discussions about desire, risk, danger and ambition in the self and in relationships. Makinson's paintings can perhaps do the same. In a time of lingering solitude, and of dangers to health and wellbeing, seeing entangled crowds of zoomorphic figures feels a little like normal. —Noah Dillon

Jessie Makinson, *Proceed daintily*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 78 3/4 x 65 inches.