

SEVEN CONTEMPORARY FEMALE PAINTERS BREATHING FRESH LIFE INTO SURREALISM

WORDS BY MARÍA ORTIZ RAPALO

In the first half of the 20th century, the post-war Western world was a chaotic blend of progress and loss, with advances in medicine and psychology fostering society to reevaluate the relationship between the mind and the body. In this context of devastation and development, André Breton established a new philosophy through his Surrealist manifesto, in which dreams and reality would resolve into “a kind of absolute reality, a surreality” of melting clocks and uncanny scenarios, of sexual explorations and conjured imagery; and so the Surrealist movement began to gain popularity, quickly spreading to the avant-garde spheres of both the visual arts and literature.

Despite the movement being male-dominated, women across the world began to employ its artistic contours to release the creative potential of their subconscious mind and plumb the depths of their dreams. Indeed, throughout history, female artists have extensively contributed to the development of this magical genre, from the mystical self portraits of Mexican icon Frida Kahlo, the seductive feminine creatures of Dorothea Tanning's paintings, or the mysterious women of Gertrude Abercrombie's conjured imagery, to the present day as seen in the work of her new contemporaries.

As art historian Whitney Chadwick notes in LACMA's catalogue of the exhibition *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*:

“Surrealism's legacy included a model for creative practices that encouraged many women to adapt its principles in their search to link artistic self-identity to the realities of gender and female sexuality.”

Jessie Makinson



Jessie Makinson, *Dandy Fooling*, 2019. Copyright the artist and Fabian Lang, Zurich.

Drawing inspiration from speculative fiction and the occult, Jessie Makinson builds her mischievous, uncanny paintings through an intuitive accretion of gesture, form, and color. As her marks coalesce into figures, a narrative emerges. The artist mines art history and science fiction alike to present scenes of sexuality and lurking menace. The underpainting can look bruised, miasmatic—an undefined presence which seeps into the tightly differentiated surface of pastels and deep shadows. It is this dance of environmental chaos and the stillness of the figures which gives the paintings a frantic, gripping energy.