

Somersault

A solo exhibition of paintings by Margaux Valengin, curated by Julie Curtiss
Presented at SPRING/BREAK Art Show
March 3 - 9, 2020

Margaux Valengin is a French painter based in Queens whose work conjures the free association of Surrealism and the rich, contrasting palette of artist Francis Picabia. Her intuition is the driving force behind her practice. Pictorial elements of disparate origin are digitally excised from their original context, to be modified and juxtaposed in a seemingly incongruous way on the canvas.

Excess, the theme of this year's SPRING/BREAK Art Show, is also a defining element of Valengin's practice, characterizing the way she formally composes her images, their content, and her engagement with pictorial source material, which she compulsively consumes, absorbs, and processes. Valengin's relationship to new images is enthusiastically egalitarian. She sources her material from everyday life, art exhibits, the Internet, and also spends hours combing through libraries' archives. Her eclectic and non-discriminatory approach to the images she excerpts, which span many millennia of art history and numerous genres, unites so-called "high" and "low" art with equal passion: Baroque art, Japanese anime, medieval illuminations, hunting scenes, retro posters, medical imagery, the combination of which challenges the viewer's perception of Kitsch.

Her work is an investigation into her own psyche, but also more broadly an exploration into the way humans live and the interconnections of the collective imagination.

In "Fire alarm," disjointed depictions of fighting dogs partially obscure the iconic Hollywood image of a couple embracing, suffusing the scene with a Buñuel-like moment where romantic love devolves into carnal urges. In "Crab hands," deep-sea creatures mingle with a gentle medieval rural scene: Men departing on a hunt climb—with total oblivion—on ludicrous piles of soft cuttlefish. Meanwhile, fish levitate in the sky, obstructing the views of some noblewomen on a turret.

The field of psychology has for a long time associated the world underwater with the unconscious mind. Valengin enjoys shuffling and re-shuffling these associations,

shifting from one register to another, turning the world on its head. She says, "My paintings have no bearing on reality; they come from a space in the mind that looks like a haunted cluttered house. By distorting and collaging the elements together, I create impossible hybrid objects and creatures. The everyday fuses with the nightmarish, the mythical and the magical."

Her images possess something crude and extravagant, both in the saturation of their colors and contrast, as well as in the sensation they convey. In "Le Mur," long manicured nails are about to gently penetrate the fiber of a bare muscle. "Glassware Experience" and "Distillation Take-Off" evoke bodily tubes, perhaps digestive or sexual organs. In a way one could say Valengin is an "Art Pathologist" who dissects, pulls apart, and reassembles. She rethinks the surface of an image, to reveal what may lie underneath.

Since her move to New York in 2016 from London, Valengin's work has been included in various group exhibitions, including at Signal Gallery and Greenpoint Terminal Gallery (both Brooklyn, New York). The SPRING/BREAK Art Show is her first solo presentation in the United States.