

A Woman By Any Other Name

by Jess Cochrane



Opening Reception: 03.06.21

Exhibition Dates: 04.06.21 – 10.07.21

Following her sell-out debut London exhibition *Study of a Woman Talking to Herself, 2019*, Jess Cochrane returns with a new body of work inspired by symbolism in 17th century portraiture. *A Woman By Any Other Name* features a suite of portraits depicting women posing to camera, adorned with the fruits and flora traditionally depicted in Renaissance portraiture.

Jess Cochrane's work is synonymous with subversive feminine beauty. In this series, she continues to connect the dots between art history, design and advertising: questioning the intent behind classical symbols in a modern *mise-en-scène*.

Cochrane's damning of traditional symbols and motifs reclaims autonomy for the women she paints. The works are confronting, both in their size and their nature, yet playful. A stuck-out tongue mocks the conservatism of classical art history; a turned back subtly spurns the way women have been viewed for millennia.

Illustrated through lively gestures of paint over photographic image, the artist rejects the outdated portrayal of women in classical portraiture and the labels placed on them. The binaries of mother or whore; saint or sinner; pure or tarnished, like bruised fruit. With each mark, she highlights how problematic these names are in their modern context. How comical!

A strawberry: denoting fertility, adorns the neck of one model. Abundant in shallow seeds, it hangs around her neck like a weight of perfect pearls.

Another model leans, languid, with an apple [traditionally bearing the message of sexual desire or sin], placed in her porcelain palm. She is on the one hand enticing and ripe; eroticized, drawing the viewer in like a forbidden fruit. On the other hand, she serves us a steely gaze, rejecting our advances as we devour her with our eyes.

As is a trademark of the artist's style, the most obvious answer is seldom correct. As always, there is a humour to this body of work. The devil's in the detail and there is a lot to unpack. Cochrane asks us to look past what we've been trained to see: the unspoken set of rules for how to read an image. She asks us to question: is the model naked for my pleasure, or hers? Is her gaze lustful, or indifferent? Is a woman's sexuality ever purely for the viewer to behold?

Symbolism plays in discord to the body language of these women, which the artist cleverly constructs: her models like marionettes. Her mark-making is so powerful it feels violent at times. A raw, visceral reaction against the harmful ways these symbols have been positioned to condemn women: how they have coloured our collective experience.

How do they read in a modern context; juxtaposed with powerful pose or a same-sex embrace? How do they make you feel when you stand before them?

The exhibition will run from 4th June - 10th July 2021.

(Operating within Government opening restrictions, measures will be in place to ensure the safety of staff and clients/visitors)

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