

STEPHEN MACKEY

Modern Gothic

Stephen Mackey's narrative paintings are mysterious and thought provoking. Characters such as a woman with the body of a dog, post-apocalyptic hairdressers or demon dressmakers populate the canvases, allowing viewers to ask questions about the scene before them. The works are done in the artist's own unique style that blends many past artistic influences.

"It's true, I do draw very heavily on the art of the past. Vigée Le Brun, Fontainebleau, Stefan Lochner, Winterhalter: the history of art is my playground," Mackey elaborates. "Firstly, I like the sheer perversity of being so anachronistic. Secondly, the mood of it suits my Gothic disposition. These people lived without lightbulbs and weren't afraid of shadows.

Even portraits of children from before the late 19th century were often lit like a creepy scene from a James Wan movie."

He adds, "[T]hose conventions that were worked out during the Renaissance and then gradually dismantled after the invention of the camera, they were just magical. The dark background, the hot foreground, the luminous figures. It looks better than life, or life seen through a superior organ to the eye."

Among Mackey's newest paintings is *Gowns from Plain Girls*, which depicts a rabbit in a pink clown costume tailoring dresses, but not "for Plain Girls," from *Plain Girls*. The simple wordplay in the title shows the dressmaker's animalistic tendencies. "As the title

1
Gowns from Plain Girls,
oil on panel, 19 x 11"

2
The Magicians,
oil on panel, 19 x 12"

3
The Dog Queen,
oil on panel, 17 x 22"

4
Prince of Fever,
oil on panel, 14 x 11"



1



2



3



4

implies, he makes dresses for pretty girls out of the skin of less attractive ones," Mackey says. "One of them is behind him, trying to evade his shears."

Another work, *The Dog Queen*, shows a woman with the body of a dog—a physique that she is not ashamed to have. "When I use these royal titles, like Queen or Princess, I'm suggesting that the individual portrayed is in their own world, and ruling it," he says. "The figures in the background I have no explanation for; there's just something going on there. It's my nod to the classical trope of loitering courtiers or old ladies folding linen, just visible behind the reclining Venus."

December 14 through January 8, Arcadia Contemporary will mount an exhibition for Mackey featuring these and a number of other new works. The UK-based artist's work has been exhibited in the gallery's group exhibitions, but this marks his debut solo show in the United States. ●

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