

MARY JANE ANSELL

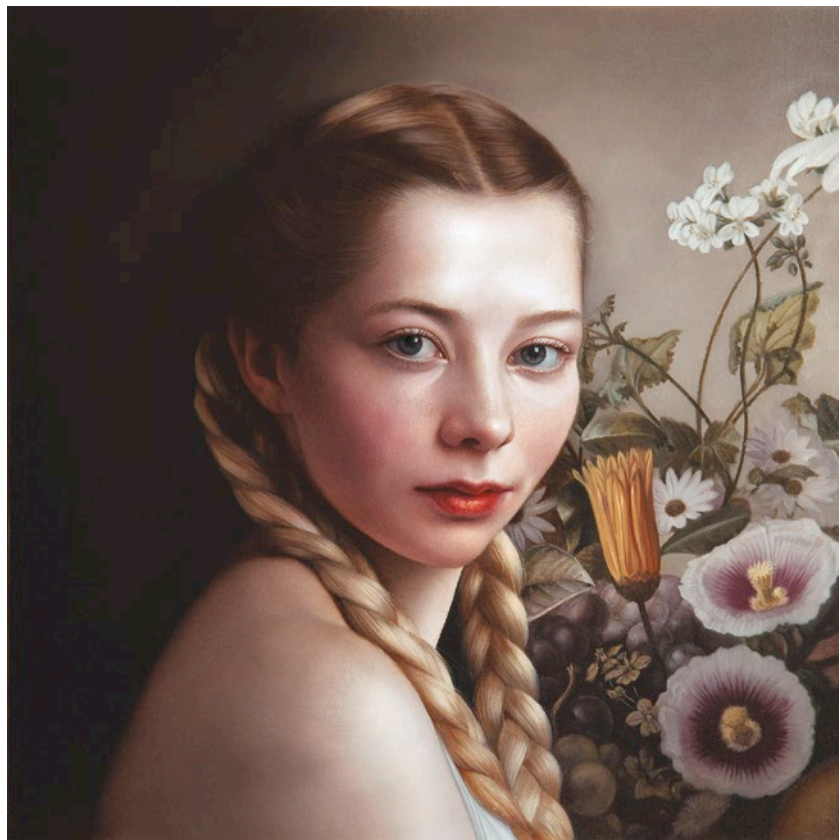
Hope and Optimism

Mary Jane Ansell's contemporary realistic paintings draw on both old and new influences, but her own artistic vision is the driving force behind each canvas. "I'm also passionate about studying the aesthetic qualities of great paintings and that has always motivated me to search for harmony, in my composition and color palette as much as my narratives and process," Ansell says. "It's all of a piece and the most successful paintings strive to hold them all in balance."

Her artwork often is a nod to the works of the Old Masters and the Dutch Golden Age of still lifes, while adding in elements from contemporary prose, politics and social issues. This is noticeable through the models she paints and the imagery that appears in her artwork, such as in *Naissance*, *Lenaia* and *Lamina II*.

"Each of these works makes reference to some of my most cherished influences. They're a way to pay homage to the works of Botticelli, Rachel Ruysch, Bosschaert amongst other luminaries," elaborates Ansell. "One of the guiding impulses behind approaching the models for these paintings was the sense that they could have stepped out directly out from another age. They make me feel a connection to the past and to the knowledge that our current plights, and pleasures, have been repeated many times throughout history."

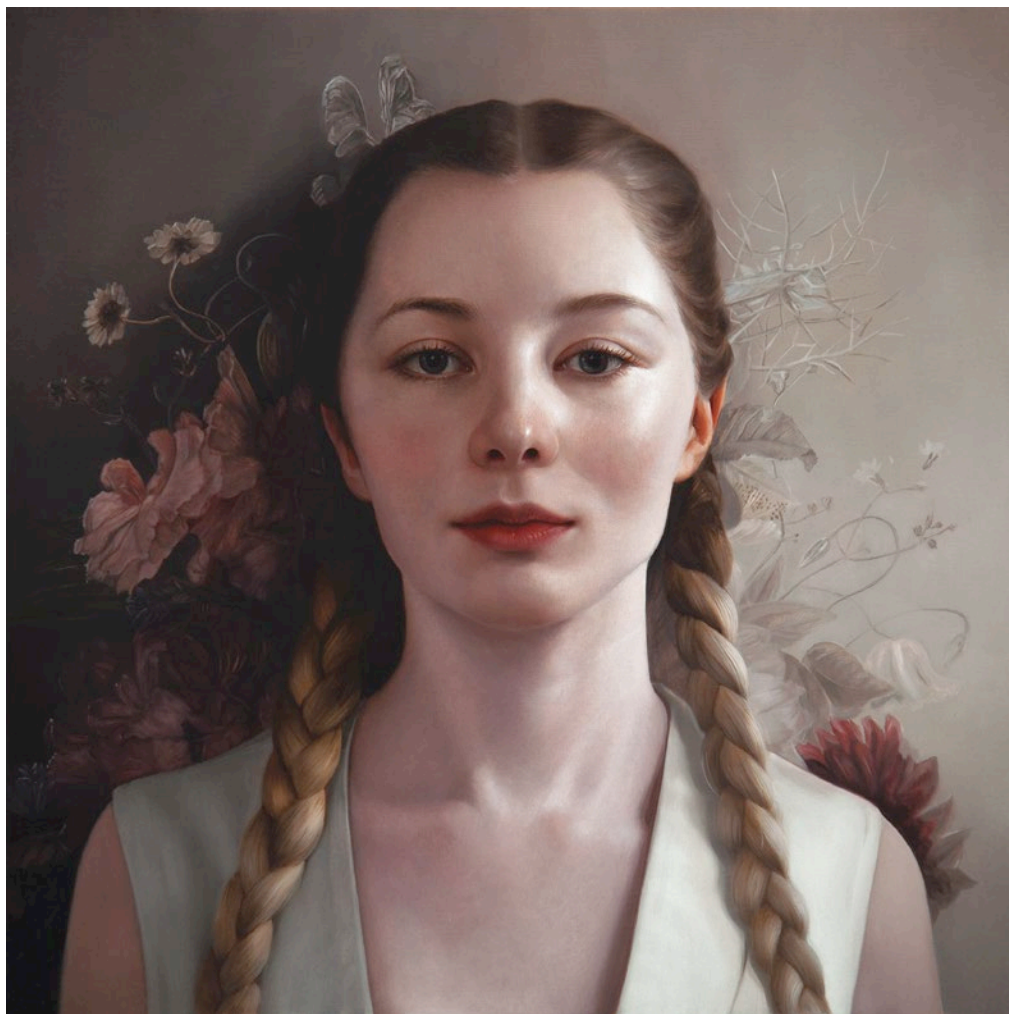
Her models are often repeated throughout her works, because it is the "slightest shifts of expression, or how the light and shadow falls that present me with a totally different set of challenges," Ansell shares. "[It lets] me see her again, in another context,



1
Possession Vine, oil on panel, 12 x 12"

2
Naissance, oil on panel, 24 x 20"





3

another incarnation. When you study a face, or any subject for that matter, repeatedly those tiny changes really can provide a completely fresh perspective."

One of her newest series of paintings features a blonde girl, her hair in braids, with different poses and expressions. Each work evokes something fresh, and the subtlety of the shifts shows Ansell's mastery of detail, form and mood. These works will be on view in the artist's third solo show at Arcadia Contemporary

from March 14 to 31. The exhibition is also the debut in the gallery's return to SoHo, New York, after five years of operating in California.

Approximately 18 paintings will be featured and, as Ansell explains, "There are certainly key threads but it was important to me that each work held its own whatever its subject or size. In fact, many of the works are smaller, echoing the jewel-like scale of a Dutch still life; I deliberately wanted to encourage

3
Papaver, oil on
aluminum panel,
12 x 12"

4
Lenaia, oil on panel,
16 x 16"

5
Eurosa, oil on aluminum
panel, 12 x 12"

closer inspection and ask the viewer to spend longer in contemplation with them. I wanted each piece to subtly shift in mood just as the models expression or its narrative did for me."

The paintings—including *Papaver* and *Eurosa*—developed over the past year, as the world began to change in a number of ways. They have been "both a respite from and reaction to some of the most extraordinary times imaginable," says Ansell. "They started to take shape against the backdrop of the end of the Brexit Campaign here in the U.K.—a divisive campaign that surrounded us with questions of freedom and nationalism amidst escalating political unrest, on both sides of the Atlantic. Alongside this, we've seen the absolutely devastating impact of climate change around the world coupled with the emergence of COVID-19 and the global pandemic."

When the coronavirus lockdown hit the U.K., Ansell's focus was pulled in many ways, making it difficult for her to head to the studio and paint in isolation as she normally would. "As the world paused for so many of us, my partner and I took stock and turned to our own garden, grateful for the chance to appreciate the nature around us. We planted seeds, built raised beds and grew as many flowers and vegetables as we could. As they grew, I welcomed their beauty into my work. I looked to a long-favored source of inspiration: the Dutch Golden Age and the glories of its still life paintings. I immersed myself in its intricate celebration of nature and found my way back to the studio," she says.

"I found that connection through the ages deeply comforting. But the backdrop of political division was never far from my thoughts, and in several of the paintings here my models take up a recurring theme, the characters of Liberty and Joan of Arc herald the knowledge that a young girl can be the catalyst for huge social change, even during times of deep unrest. They carry the motivation to change destinies," Ansell continues. "That idea has always strongly resonated with me even in the childlike guise of Alice in Wonderland, who is also referenced here. Strong and independent in the face of adversity they signify hope and optimism to me." ●

Arcadia Contemporary

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