

Madeline Ludwig-Leone



Recommended by Lily Wei

Madeline Ludwig-Leone is a painter at the beginning of her career, always an exhilarating moment. She graduated from Yale in 2015 with a BA in Fine Art and a BA in American Studies and is based in Brooklyn. The dozen works of hers on view here (six on paper—handmade; six on panel) are from 2018 through this year. Her draftsmanship is meticulous, her color sense sophisticated, and her themes plunk themselves down in gender territory with grace and a beguiling self-consciousness. The paintings, often tiny, are sometimes whimsical, sometimes disconcerting, leading us somewhere unexpected, even odd. Representations of femininity are much on her mind, using animals as surrogates for the female figure. Slinky, independent cats and nimble, fertile rabbits frequently appear, for instance. One recurrent image is that of a rabbit with a squiggly patterned coat that is a “brain” in the form of a rabbit, she explained. The element of design found in these works is also a tribute to craft and handiwork, once undervalued as the domain of women. Her invented cast of characters makes me think of the cheeky, delightfully humanized creatures in children’s books, innocence paired with cunning, fact with fancy. About her recent work, she said: “I’ve been gravitating toward more stylized imagery, building a cohesive but unsettling visual world.”

Lily Wei, Fall 2020

Bio

Madeline Ludwig-Leone is a visual artist living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Primarily a painter, Ludwig-Leone also works in video, textile, drawing, and other media. Her work deals with themes of nostalgia, femininity and disquietude, and has been shown at the Co-Creative Center in New Bedford, MA; Inadequate Lighting, Baltimore, MD; Dedee Shattuck Gallery, Westport, MA; Yeah Maybe, Minneapolis, MN; and Green Gallery at Yale University, New Haven, CT, among others. She studied art at Yale University, receiving her BFA there in 2015. In addition to her artistic practice, Ludwig-Leone also co-curates *Little Meat Up*, a series of salon-style discussions where

artists present works in progress in a critical, supportive environment. Visual artist, Jennifer Wen Ma, and freelance exhibition consultant, Mariluz Hoyos, are collaborators on this project.

Artist Statement

The emotions that drive our behavior are so often self-contradictory and paradoxical. Joy and excitement are frequently not far removed from grief or despair, especially in childhood, when everything is heightened and new. This body of work grew out of a desire to spark fluid, multilayered emotional responses and to assess them at a remove. The paintings are tiny windows into a mercurial world, where nothing is certain. Memory and identity are distilled into totemic, graphic imagery and enigmatic scenes lit by fleeting or unknown sources. Often, something lurking outside the frame or under the surface lends a sense of uneasy foreboding. A farmhouse in evening light, for instance, creates a peaceful impression at first glance, but longer looking reveals uncanny shapes in the shadows.

Natural imagery is a recurring theme, stemming from a childhood spent in rural New England. Plants, animals, and landscapes stand in for cultural tropes and personal experiences. Animals are an especially rich source of association: Horses appear as a signifier of strength and of femininity. Rabbits also embody femininity, but in a more docile, gentle form. Cats suggest inscrutability, but also the alluring comfort of complacency. I explore these traditional connotations through the lens of my own experience.

Often, notions of femininity are subverted to create a more individualized definition of womanhood. In *Scum Bunny*, for example, a ballerina with an idealized female form and the head of a rabbit is superimposed over algae-filled water that can be perceived as either an abundant source of life or a stagnant cesspool.

Graphic pattern and color are used alongside carefully rendered images, creating depth and flatness in varying degrees. The small scale and glossy surface of the panels turn the paintings into precious, jewel-like objects that are at once absurd, evocative, and nostalgic.

Works in the Exhibition



Scatterbrain



Outdoor Cat



Hoof



Space Blob (Autumn)



Pearl Ravioli



Scum Bunny



Stack of Green Starfish



Divine Cubes



Giftwrapped Wolf



Night Swimming



Constriction



It's Brunch 3 (for KP)