

# Alex McQuilkin



## Recommended by Helaine Posner

Alex McQuilkin is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice includes video, installation, painting, and drawing. Her work explores female identity and the ways in which popular culture, such as television, movies, and advertising, undermines a secure sense of self by promoting unattainable standards of feminine beauty and dreams of domestic bliss. McQuilkin is drawn to these tropes yet is keenly aware of the insidious effect of their internalization. In *Scarlet* (2013) the artist renders a beautifully flowing head of blond hair minus its owner, prompting viewers to project themselves onto this idealized, objectified image. *Untitled (Pink Lady with Flowers)* (2020) is one of a series of meticulously hand-painted drawings based on mass-produced wallpaper patterns, in this case designs from 1880s New England homes. The layered imagery depicts a “lady” in a genteel domestic space which the artist subtly disrupts with torn and tattered edges. McQuilkin’s work is an ongoing critique of the construction of gender identity and of class structure.

*Helaine Posner, Fall 2020*

## Bio

Alex McQuilkin’s work has been exhibited internationally since 2000. Her paintings, drawings, videos and sculptures explore themes such as the role of cultural aesthetics in defining female identity and the power structures embedded within artifice. Recent highlights include solo exhibitions in NY and Germany and group exhibitions at MoMA PS1, KW Institute in Berlin, Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, and Centre Pompidou in Paris. McQuilkin’s work has been reviewed in the NY Times, the Village Voice, FlashArt, Art Magazine, and elsewhere. She received her MFA from New York University and is currently a professor of art at New York University.

## Artist Statement

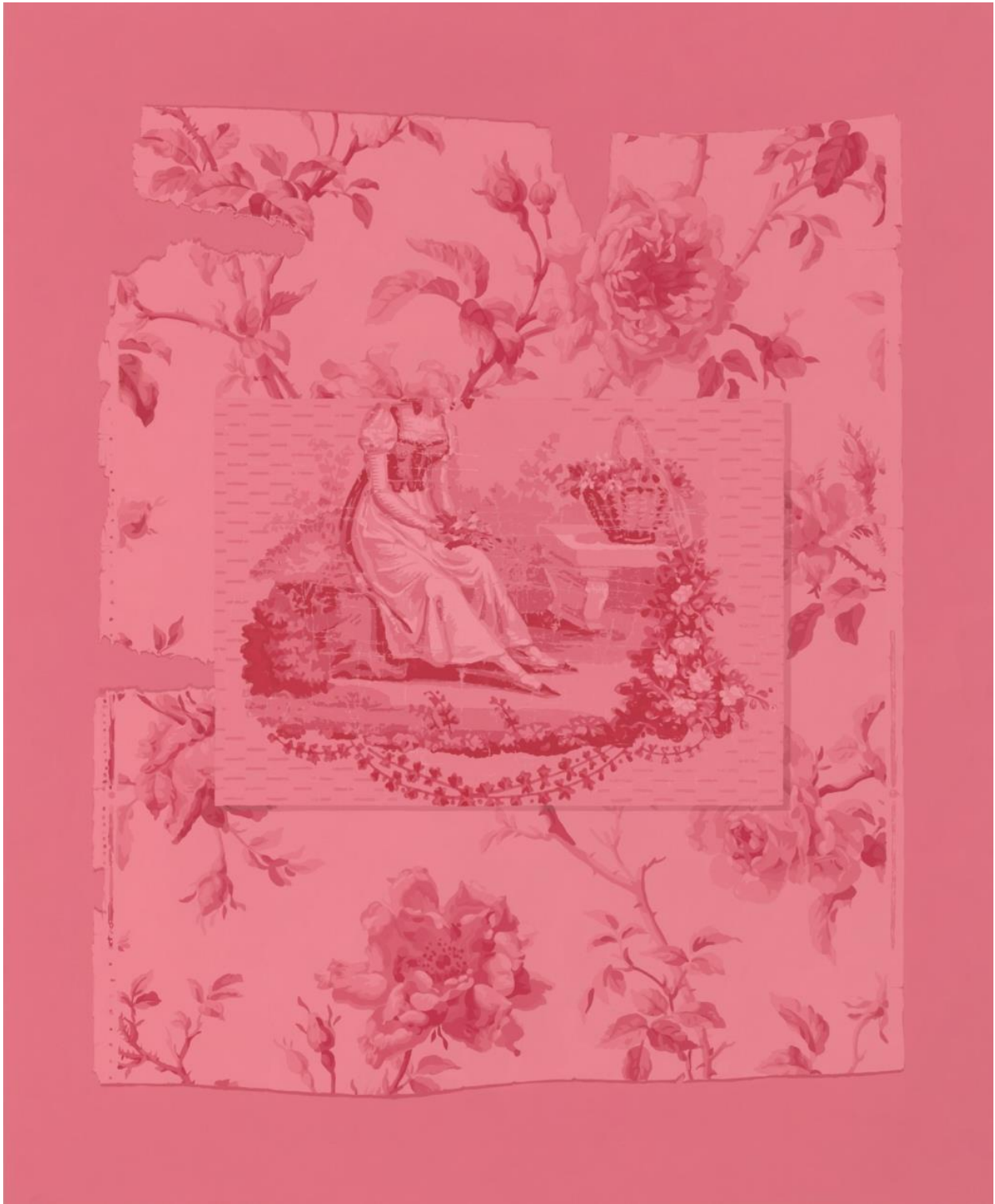
My work explores the tangled relationship between the aesthetics of popular culture and female identity. Juxtaposing various forms of imagery—from mass-produced textiles to commercial

advertising—I examine the subtle and insidious ways that contemporary culture influences the private self. In my paintings, drawings, sculptures, and videos I examine how one’s identity is shaped through images dictating beauty and lifestyle that surround us every day.

I began my investigation of the relationship between an artificially constructed self-image and the violent loneliness that it both conceals and creates through performative video. Using costumes and wigs, I enacted drag performances of myself in front of the camera. The relationship between these highly stylized characters and the sets on which they performed became the subject of the work. The background images and objects became vehicles of identity and meaning, equally as important as the actions being performed. I came to see how the spaces in which we live not only tell our stories but create them, as well. I began isolating background patterns and images, creating works on paper, paintings with collaged photographs on them, which allowed the viewer’s full attention to be concentrated on these “sets.”

My current series, hand painted renderings of wallpaper, takes the idea of the home interior as its starting point and draws upon the visual language of mass-produced wallpapers to comment on gender roles and class structures. The designs are distinctive of class (or the aspirations of class), of social structures, and social expectations. I paint intricate “feminine” patterns in a flattened pictorial space and then disrupt that space with abstract gestures: a repeat pattern ends abruptly or a barely perceivable glitch in the pattern disturbs its uniformity. The glitches in these patterns of flowers, bows, quilting, and stripes simultaneously meld the interior of mind with external physical space, suggesting an internal realization that society is a tenuous construction, and its limitations are only as real as one allows them to be.

## Works in the Exhibition



*Alex McQuilkin 2020. Untitled (Pink Lady with Flowers), Flashe on Paper on Panel 29.5" x 35.75"*



*Alex McQuilkin 2013. Scarlet, Colored Pencil and Pastel on Paper 39" x 27"*