

Lyles & King

Jessie Makinson

Stay here while I get a curse

October 28 - December 11, 2021

Opening Reception: October 28

Jessie Makinson uses painting as a direct form of thinking, rather than as a vehicle for a specific message. Often, her work centres around interlocking, demi-human forms that link and uncouple with each other and the spaces they inhabit. Makinson's is not a humanistic approach, but one instead defined by equal treatment of figures and their backgrounds. In her hands, negative spaces become shapes and patterns spread between bodies and architecture. Particularly present among the works on view, this tactic lends her paintings an uncanny feeling of both cohesion and dissolution, impending chaos and newfound fluidity.

Stay here while I get a curse is the artist's fullest expression to date of such apparent paradoxes. In the painting which shares the exhibition's title, Makinson's cast of characters appear as focused as they are distracted. They grasp hold of one another but seem unable or unwilling to make eye contact. They're high fashion but also unclothed, adorned instead by Escherian geometries or – as in “And other darlings” (2021) – breath. These jarring combinations, treated with the artist's uniformly smooth brushstrokes, conjure the terror of modern-day ambivalence one might recognize from the experience of being very online, doom scrolling, or reading too much news.

Makinson merges contemporary motivation with historical language, and borrows loosely from iconic compositions including the Annunciation, Purgatory and the Garden of Eden in order to craft her own. Crucial elements of her paintings might most readily be described as animals and clothes: things which we might normally consider in terms of their use value, for example as accessories or fashion. Makinson, however, employs them in almost every part of her work, not as things to be worn or consumed per se, but as a literal fabric of existence. This is a speculative and fantastical gesture that draws its inspiration equally from science fiction and ancient pagan tradition. In the worlds put forth by Makinson's paintings, notions of cosmic interconnectedness coexist with the creation and discovery of other forms of life. Jessie Makinson's own process begins with surprise. She mixes dry pigment with wet acrylic dispersant, then uses soft brushes to spread this mixture across canvas and generate a pattern. She considers this an essential exercise in exploring her own subconscious that enables her to start a painting by searching for something rather than with a particular storyline in mind. At a time in which imagination is given less and less place in everyday life, as screens and artificial intelligence increasingly think and see for us, Makinson seems to resist the notion that art springs from any single idea. Hers is a hive mind, brought swarming to life in paintings that animate the multisensory sensation of looking – at each other and ourselves, as much in the present as in history.

— Isabel Parkes, 2021