

New York Exhibition

Janet Werner

CRUSH

Sept 9 – Oct 23, 2022



Janet Werner, Untitled (bandana), 2021, Oil on canvas, 76 x 60 in.

Arsenal Contemporary Art NY is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Montreal-based painter Janet Werner. Over the last three decades, Werner has developed an idiosyncratic visual language grounded in the figurative tradition, and driven by her commitment to a pictorial research that is equal part formalist and subjective.

Often, Werner's work is read merely as a critique of female objectification by the corporate (assumed male) gaze. Rather, Werner is interested in how the body is a fertile terrain for hypersubjectification. Her paintings address the proliferation of images of bodies in today's culture, how they are infinitely bent and twisted to convey a profusion of messages. Flipping through fashion magazines, Werner allows herself to be enthralled and seduced by advertising or editorial images that she then tears out, folds, crops or rips before reassembling them in the manner of exquisite corpses. The title of this exhibition, CRUSH, therefore carries a double entendre: Werner's infatuation with the found images and her subsequent urge to trample over them.

Undoubtedly, there is a certain violence in the production of Janet Werner's work. Werner recognizes this tendency herself, admitting that she destroys a portrait if it gets too photographic or static. The figures are distorted as they become subjects of her paintings, often acquiring new limbs, or body parts in the process. In a way, Werner turns her subjects into monsters. But while monsters exist in the collective imagination as cruel and frightening creatures that terrorize, the etymology of the word comes from the Latin *monere*, which means to warn or to show. Monsters, then, are creatures of revelation; they are messengers. The process of deconstruction and reconfiguration in Werner's work withdraws the figure from being

a passive object of consumption and integrates it into a complex discord of messages that can never get fully absorbed. The figures remain in suspense, unconsumed and unconsumable.

Janet Werner's work is also resolutely formalist. Ultimately, the artist seeks a visual dynamism that can only be achieved by the juxtaposition and integration of colours, shapes and planes. While there are recognizable elements within Werner's paintings and the figure continues to anchor her work, a powerful drive towards abstraction is equally felt, and portraiture is but one tool in her relentless quest towards compositional vitality.

Janet Werner (b. 1959 in Winnipeg, MB, lives and works in Montreal). She holds an MFA from Yale University (New Haven, CT) and a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art (Baltimore, MD). In 2019, the Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal held a retrospective of her work. Other recent solo exhibitions include Keer Tanchak (Dallas), Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal), Anat Egbi (Los Angeles), Esther Massry (Albany, NY), Esker Foundation (Calgary), McIntosh Art Gallery (London, UK).

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