

Sam Korman, "Mira Dancy," *Cura Magazine*, March 2016.

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***MIRA  
DANCY***

***BY SAM KORMAN***



## ABOUT

When you see an ad on the train, do you remember the last time you saw it? Or the time before that? Do you anticipate the next place you'll see it – train, bus, back of cab, a magazine? Have you seen the Coca Cola ad in a Dutch still life? Have you seen the woman in the Gucci ad that looks like a Titian painting? Is that Friskies ad a Balthus? Was that the picture your friend was imitating on Instagram? Mira Dancy immerses herself in this network of direct and ambient influence, the connections between images that forge economy and meaning from historic and contemporary representations of women. Dancy's work interrogates this latency that inhabits images – it is a mapping of desires manifest, a geography of the city and the body. Dramatizing sight through site, her paintings, neons, and wall drawings enact slippages in these representational systems where the female figure is vivaciously, absurdly, willfully, troublingly, and hilariously present.

Who are the women that adorn Dancy's work? During a recent studio visit, a suite of drawings lay in a random sequence on the floor. In brushy black and white they depict quick vignettes: a nude woman boldly leans on a set of stairs, the word "HERFUME" to her left; another stands in stark shadows, lifting her leg at an oblique angle to the background; a female model reclines in the window of a storefront, her underwear lightly brushed on as if to retain some delicacy; and a woman in a tutu is firmly planted alone and angry on a subway platform. The drawings are fragments from recognizable stories – cinematic tropes, typologies, snapshots of female clichés. Be they one-liners or film noir femmes fatales, the drawings caricature their subjects through some localized irony – why is the woman in the subway so lonely, so trapped, so desolately funny? They are the first-thought visual vocabulary of character from which she extrapolates more complex and theatrical forms.

*Black Dime//Late Spring* (2015), part of Dancy's recent exhibition *Want Position//Red*, layers multiple figures in varying affective registers. A large, reclining woman stretches across the canvas. Painted in shades of cadmium red and orange, she is sculpted in a body-builder way: amazonian, pumped-up, and posed brazenly matter-of-fact. Another painted in shades of periwinkle and purple looks up at the red figure from the lower right-hand corner – her roman nose and body the tell-tale classicism of her otherwise cartoonish presentation. And a floating rectangle displays the cropped lower portion of a bronze woman sitting on a sundial. Dancy produces paintings such as these by combining several drawings – they overlay, cancel, negate, and reconfigure into spaces and narratives with a fractured coherence. Is it a story of some crooked jealousy, a triple leap in time in which absurdity redoubles through recursive imitations of extreme









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bodily realities? Dancy weds character to color – it's melodramatic, camp, surreal, and cheesy. But they are absolutely inseparable from their dramatic pigmentation, conveying a brazenly visual narrative beyond the picture plane.

As *Black Dime//Late Spring* borrows from German Expressionism, other works deploy stylistic devices from other modernist legacies. *Psychic Massage Pillow Pose* (2014) is a triangular canvas battened, as the title suggests, into a large pillow. It depicts a dizzying tableau: amidst soaked-in fields of pink, purple, yellow, and blue, an image of a woman spreadeagled is painted clearly in bold black lines. Her hands seem to have multiplied: the figure is caressed, cleaved to, harried, rubbed, or held by multiple hands – some witchy, others normal, all with nails. Her ribs and sternum are prominent, her breasts are flat, and her legs are brawny with shaded, subtle arches. The figure is calm, candid, direct, and familiar – the yoga body – as are the Cubist, Social Realist, and Ab-Ex references. But in spite of her meditative posture, her left breast intervenes: it appears to exist in two places at once, on her chest and squarely in her armpit. With three cartoon clocks floating around her, this might be a nip-slip in time.

Humor is one way that Dancy re-affirms the body. The intuitive science of mysticism alluded to by the title is another. Amidst the swirling atmospherics of this and other works, psychics, massage parlors, and nail salons – frequent motifs for Dancy – help to place the figure. Seldom advertising their services with more than a pithy neon sign – the language that surrounds them does not exceed “PSYCHIC” or “MASSAGE,” if there is even an illustration – the value of their life-hacks often seems self-evident. They exist in zoned-ground-floor-commercial condos and historic neighborhoods, they are a constant against the ubiquitously branded and re-branded environs of New York. In this way, they represent alternative markers of time, and mirror the logotyping through which Dancy develops her iconography. The psychic's wisdom or the affordable luxury of the nail salon make desires visible. With their enduring services, they map the presence and needs of their clientele.

Dancy deploys one of these generic businesses, as well as the female body, to interrogate architectural space. *Mystique Boutique*, part of her recent contribution to MoMA PS1's *Greater New York*, borrows its name from a knock-off store on Canal Street in Lower Manhattan. The work is a large wall drawing that straddles the corner of a massive, open space. Blown up to almost-cinematic scale, it depicts a reclining woman floating supernaturally in front of the eponymous storefront. She awkwardly props herself up while her sinewy legs, dressed in sleek black tights, insinuate themselves into a lineup of





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