

KubaParis

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Grace Weaver – Studio visit

Hey Grace! You're currently preparing for your first solo exhibition at Galerie Soy Capitán called "Skinny Latte." Can you say a bit about how you came up with the title and some of the idea that have informed your work?

"Skinny Latte" was the endpoint of a convoluted little string of fascinations. In so many of my paintings, I'll tip up the ground-plane (whether it's a city street, the floor of a bedroom, or a beachscape) so that the horizon is near the top of the canvas. I knew there must be some poetic meaning to that gesture, and in the hunt for that meaning, I came across a beautiful lecture called "Painting at Ground Level," by T.J. Clark. He delves into Pieter Bruegel the Elder's "The Land of Cockaigne" Clark mentions, in a funny aside, that the German title for the painting is "Schlaraffenland," which might be translated literally as "lazy-greedy-land" or "land of milk and honey." I became enamored with this as a setting for a series of paintings: a place halfway between reality and fable, where vices and virtues are made visible by a cast of exaggerated characters. I tried to imagine how a "land of milk and honey" would translate in a twenty-first century context, and realized I had to evoke a more "lite" side of indulgence in the title. That's where "Skinny Latte" came from: that very twenty-first century breed of deliciousness that is simultaneously lush and "lite," rich and empty. I hope the paintings embody an analogous contradiction in terms.

Obviously one of the most striking aspects of your work is the intensity of colors. In what ways does color factor into your painting process?

I think of painting more in terms of engineering an atmosphere than in telling a story. Color is such a useful tool to that end, in that it can hit you more viscerally than cerebrally. My happiest achievement is to get two colors side by side—both of which I love individually—but that in combination verge on a kind of grotesque "too-much-ness." Old Holland's "Brilliant Pink" and "Coral Orange" oils do that pretty reliably. I thought of these paintings as being made for what you could call

“maximum mouthfeel”—made more to be tasted than viewed, and tipping into the territory of the “too-sweet.”

You’re underscoring the banality of “lite” with its essential grotesqueness in the figures themselves: The way bodies and perspectives are contorted reminds me of early Expressionist and even Gothic. What drew you to this dynamic?

I read a great interview with Amy Sillman once, where she recounted coming to terms with her own knack for conjuring up impossibly cute animals. She opted not to dispose of that skill, to paint the world’s cutest elephant (complete with dopey eyelashes) and then wrestle through and against it on the canvas. That really gave me permission to play to my own strengths—loopy calligraphic lines and whimsical elongation of the figures—and then to fight them in equal measure. As the paintings go through many, many versions, those figures get manhandled and contorted in ways that diverge from anatomical correctness. It’s like clamping down a vice-grip on whimsy.

In everyday life, we encounter cuteness on a relatively trivialized and viral level: like cat videos and childhood nostalgia, to name just two. Can you talk a bit about the dimensions of cuteness that figure into your aesthetic?

Generationally (speaking as a millennial here) the cute is so deeply embedded in our aesthetic DNA. We were raised on Lisa Frank, Polly Pocket, American Girl Dolls, and Disney... how could we avoid the cute? I think the idea of cuteness—taken alone—contains an uncomfortable double meaning: it is both light-hearted and dark. I love how Sianne Ngai characterizes the cute as “not just an aestheticization but an eroticization of powerlessness.” I’m always after the most complicated relationship I can achieve with the figures in my paintings. As a child you love your Barbie so much but in a way that necessitates your ultimate control over her. You have to be free to chop off all of her hair or decapitate her on a whim. That’s not so different from how I treat the figures in my paintings.

You’re also making direct references to contemporary female culture, in particular what takes place online.

I suppose my embrace of “girliness” came about as a sort of “come to Jesus” moment I’ve had with my paintings over the course of the last few years. I want to be almost embarrassingly true to my own life experiences in the work: my own hopes and

anxieties and triumphs and failures as a twenty-something girl in 21st Century America.

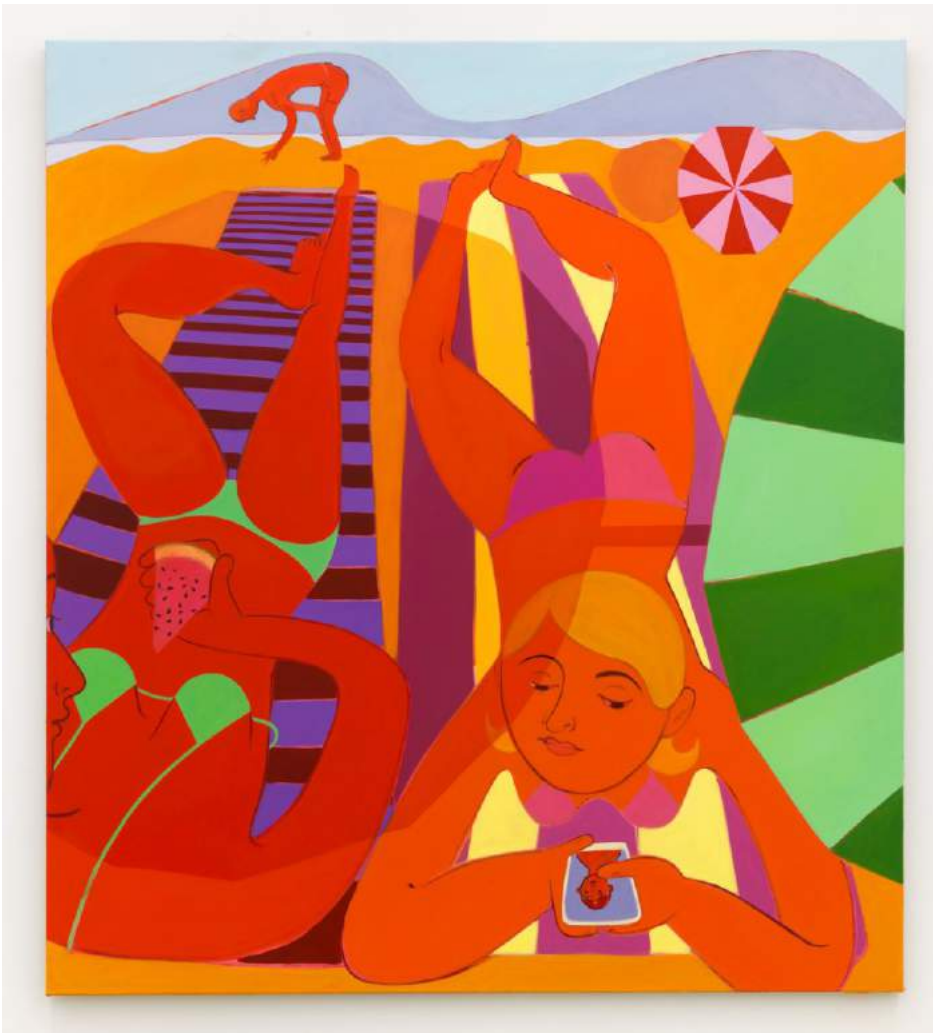
Which is more and more recently being elevated into more theoretical discussions. Are you interested in the more radicalized interpretations of young women in context of consumerism and neoliberal society?

Yes, I remember coming across Tiqqun's construction of the "Young-Girl" (she who is at the very "center of capitalism," the simultaneous subject of and target for mass advertising). Their text, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* paints this fascinatingly ambivalent picture of what it means to be a young woman today. I related so deeply to their invented prototype. She embodies this complicated mix of power (in her sexuality, her youth) but also a humiliating self-consciousness and weakness (she worships at the altar of women's magazines, bemoans her minor imperfections). The Young-Girl seemed like an interesting and important voice to realize in painted form. It also seemed to point out a path for how one might explore certain aspects of contemporary "youthiness" (online dating, the selfie, etc.) without overtly critiquing or glorifying them, but rather speaking of them from the ambivalent position of a willing participant.









Getaway, 2015, Oil on linen, 200 x 180 cm



Lust for lite, 2014 Oil on linen, 240 x 200 cm



Profile, 2015, Oil on linen, 120 x 100 cm



Studio



Sunday brunch w/bb, 2015 Oil on linen, 120 x 100 cm



Winning some / losing some, 2015 Oil on linen, 80 x 70 cm

Interview by Zoë Harris, September 2015.