

MONICA DE CARDENAS

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DANIELLE ORCHARD

The Modern Woman, Through the Eyes of Danielle Orchard

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Painting is a true act of presence. In part, it requires an artist to look back in time to recall their aesthetic style, and the future may affect their process in the form of anxiety around the final result or overall success. However, the physical act of painting is something that is completely about the present. “The end result is a record of small decisions about holding onto a fleeting joy, brought about by a certain material. Accessing that joy is something I consider a gift of the present,” explains Danielle Orchard. The women she paints are a mixture of personal memory, art history, and an evolving fantasy version of ordinary life—where the interior world of each character is both revealed and allowed to influence the physical world around them.

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Her Brooklyn studio is filled with artworks of female figures relaxing on beaches, in parks, and in baths. Distinguished primarily by the bright colors and bold lines, her paintings depict the often nude female form in varying, familiar poses: smoking a cigarette, drinking wine, or arms crossed, brooding and exhausted. Although they are seemingly at leisure, “the forms used to compose these settings are tense and anxious,” she says. “Each character is distracted and directed by a sense of being watched, and yet each fails to live up to the viewer’s expectations. They mimic art history, but they remove the deflated eroticism of their idealized artistic ancestry.” It is as if the color, beauty, and fun in her works try to cloud the circumstances in which the subjects find themselves.

Orchard is interested in the role that drama and performance play in the everyday emotional lives of women, and how those dramas can often disappoint and contradict the inherited notions of life as a woman. “I’m interested in how this disappointment can be celebrated, how it humanizes and complicates representations of women which have classically lacked dimension and complexity,” she states. “My painting language is most influenced by the layered space and fragmentation of Analytical Cubism, and I use that to express my lived experiences of feminine physicality and emotion.”