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MOUSSE

**Janet Werner “Call Me When You Start Wearing Red” at Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles
February 18, 2023**



Janet Werner “Call Me When You Start Wearing Red” at Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles 2023.

This show was selected as part of Los Angeles Oomph—a roundup of the best contemporary art exhibitions and events held by galleries, museums, and institutions in L.A. during February 2023 on the occasion of Frieze Los Angeles art fair. Curated by Mousse.

Janet Werner is an artist known for painting psychological portraits of women. “Call Me When You Start Wearing Red,” examines ideas of being divided, dualities of human nature, and inner multiplicity. Werner externalizes these psychological splits within her ‘broken pictures.’ Side-stepping narrative, her subjects present more as ideas—vessels for viewers to pour themselves into. We relate to them through their disruptions—shrinking heads, contorting bodies, flipping figures upside-down, or partial obscuration.

For over two decades, Werner has explored the possibilities of her photographic source material—images of women culled both from fashion magazines and art historical references. Although her work and style continue to eschew naturalism, she has also grown ever-more ambivalent about her subjects-cum-performers, finding increasing satisfaction with her interruptions and “determined more than ever to break them apart and alter them in obvious and aggressive ways, a shift away from the idea of a unitary wholeness.”

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Nonetheless the works possess a seductive openness, a vulnerability manifested through the figures' gazes that allows viewers to project onto them. Werner's paintings are not just the image, but the encounter, viewer *and* painting, the hypnotic power between them ignited by the artist's mature, assured paint handling.

A thread of performativity runs through the works, not just because the models are performing for the camera, but actual references to magic occur in the work—levitation, dressing up, acrobatics, circuses, and clowns—not to mention the roles of femininity on display. As the artist, Werner too is a performer of sorts, and asserts that “if I do the paintings right, the viewer can ‘complete the trick.’”

Often soft and gestural, Werner gives the paintings an edge through color contrasts that are often derived from fashion sources. Garments, shoes, and accessories present prominent and highly delineated opportunities to be expressive and bold with color. Explorations of texture, folds, and shadows, introduce different rhythms of brushwork, broadening her lexicon of mark making in the compositions. Each new painting adds an opportunity for experiments with transparency, high chroma, and patterning ultimately contributing to the sense of mystery, play, and provocation in the overall exhibition.