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MONTREAL GAZETTE

Montreal artist reframes line between art and life in new show

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Montreal artist Janet Werner is exhibiting *Breaker* and several other works.

“I’m looking for a surprise,” said Janet Werner. “I’m looking for questions. I’m looking for something that makes you stop and wonder, ‘What the hell is that?’”

The Montreal painter, whose exhibition, *There There*, is at the Bradley Ertaskiran gallery through June 13, is one of three veteran women artists reframing the world around them in new shows as the city emerges from a lockdown haze.

Werner blurs the boundaries of the frame with a gleeful sense of mischief in her deconstructed portraits made from images in fashion magazines, which have inspired her work for the past 20 years.

Did I say deconstructed?

“I prefer disrupting, interrupting, subverting,” said the artist, who pores through thousands of pages to find photos she likes, then uses collage to re-contextualize her subjects in disparate surroundings.

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“I have this weird feeling that I want to get rid of the women sometimes,” she confessed. “When I’m working with the material, it astonishes me that the image is often not that interesting, but as soon as I deface it, or remove the face, it gets so much more interesting.”

Painting styles, textures and environments clash in *There There*, as Werner mashes up realities, pushing viewers to constantly question their perspective.

In *VAR*, a woman in a mauve gown lies within the dark surface of a square at the bottom left of the canvas — is she dead? Resting? Thinking? Along the top and right sides of the canvas, we glimpse two seemingly incongruous settings: trees and sky, and below, an abstract ground of yellows and greens.

In the striking piece *Breaker*, a red swimsuit-clad woman walks toward us on a beach, the right side of her face and body obscured by thickly painted strips of red, pink, beige and black, which take up the entire right half of the work.

“I’m actually a very formal, abstract painter,” Werner explained. “As much as there’s narrative and an interest in the figure (in my paintings), there’s also an equally strong interest in abstraction and aspects of formal painting.”