

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists



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Americana Archetypes Frolic Centerstage in Rebecca Morgan's Solo Show Town and Country at Asya Geisberg Gallery

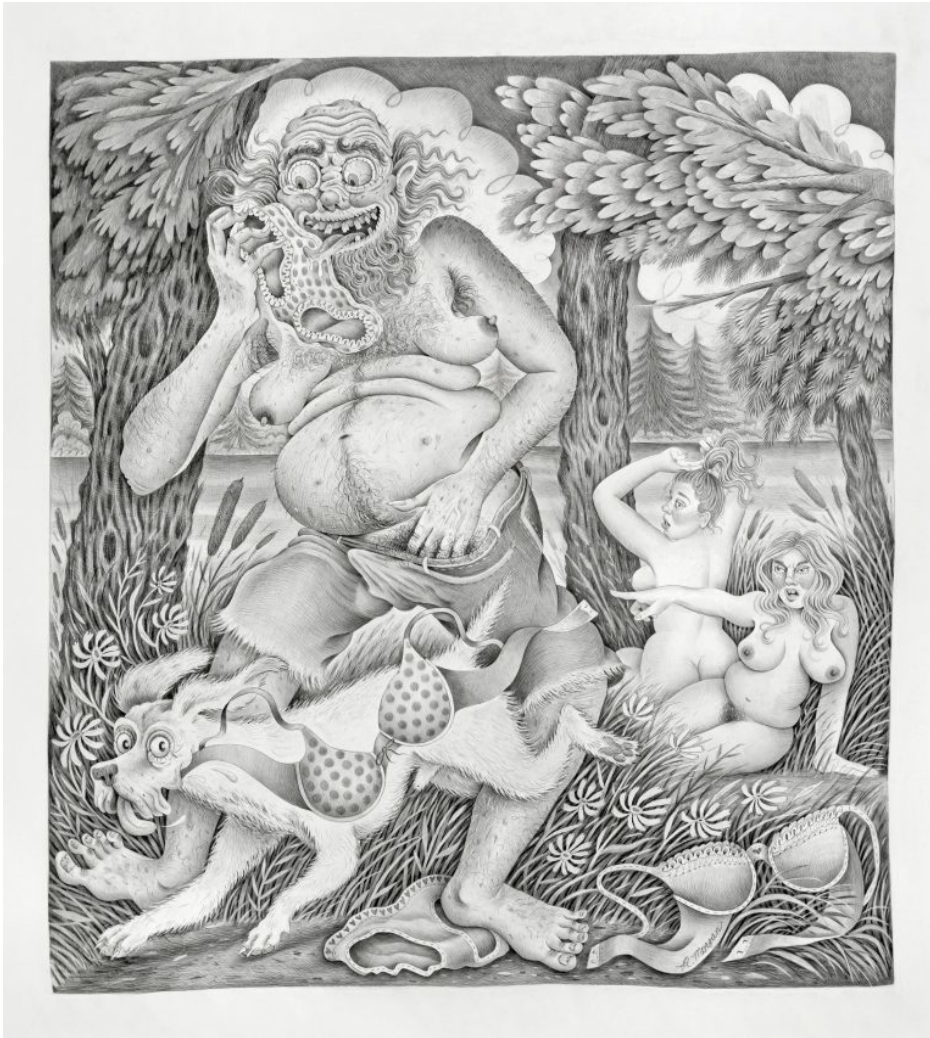


Rebecca Morgan's solo exhibition "Town and Country" at Asya Geisberg offers viewers a subversive and unflinching look into aesthetics of Americana. Panty raiding hillbillies, buxom bonnet sporting milkmaids, and characters engaged in Appalachian revelry scrupulously rendered in paint, graphite, and brass galavant throughout the exhibition. Morgan's cringeworthy figuration walks the line between portraiture and allegory and highlights the pitfalls of romanticization. Inspired by the sucker-punch illustrations of R Crumb, Morgan's depictions of rural life speak to notions of voyeurism, power dynamics, and the ubiquity of toxic masculinity within contemporary American culture. The works included in "Town and Country" strike a balance between hilarity and horror and provide a fantastical portal into the American psyche. I had the opportunity to chat with Morgan about her fourth solo show with the gallery and reflect upon her personal fascination with the subjects she portrays.

KH: The figures, caricatures, and archetypes you render feel fully realized and eerily familiar. I wouldn't be surprised if your figures have names and backstories. Is this the case or am I romanticizing things too much?

RM: Romanticizing it is great! Sometimes the characters are friends or family. I use their likeness directly and others I take a lot of license with. I grew up watching a lot of television and reading MAD

Magazine and books mainly comprised of Americana archetypes and allegories. When cast in a different light these characters expose a seedy underbelly. I think about them as a part of the romanticized Americana that never really was.



KH: Was the large graphite drawing towards the front of the gallery executed with this exhibition in mind?

RM: Yes, it was. I want that image to sum up all the other images.

I have been trying for years to make a swimming hole scene but had just never been able to get it how I needed it to be. Norman Rockwell is one of my most important influences and there are many swimming scenes- particularly boys running ragged from a private swimming hole with their clothes among other scenes of mild debauchery which I have always been influenced by.

These art historical tropes are fascinating to me and I like to make my own versions of them. In my drawing, "Panty Stealer," I wanted to make an image of women under siege; most of the images of the show come from that place. I wanted to depict women just trying to have a nice day, enjoying themselves but interrupted by a male feverishly stealing their underwear, sniffing them and being excited and completely deliriously consumed by them. It is a reflection of how I feel every day as a woman in a world controlled by men.

KH: When was the last time you made a drawing at this scale?

RM: I truly love and revere drawing- it is the most fundamental part of my studio practice; everything revolves around it. I made a large drawing for my last show at Asya Geisberg Gallery two years ago; I make a large drawing for each exhibition.

KH: Considering this is your fourth solo show with Asya Geisberg, how did your relationship with the gallery begin?

RM: I was working with a gallery right out of graduate school at Pratt Institute and they gave me my first solo exhibition. The brilliant curator and gallerist Renee Riccardo introduced me to Asya the night of the opening. Asya was just opening up her own gallery and soon after she put me in a group show at her space. Not long after, I made the transition to being represented. I have been with AGG since 2011 and I'm very thankful for her vision; she understands me and my work and that means the very most to me.

KH: The work in brass appears to be in dialogue with your ongoing ceramic work.

RM: Ceramics and foundry entail so many variables while painting and drawing are more straight forward for me. I like working in different modes. I tend to be tight and straight when I need to be, loose and responding to chance at other times. I found that I am almost always rewarded when I let go and lean into the unknown formal void. If I wasn't able to let go, I would never be able to keep my sanity.

KH: What prompted the desire to translate your work into brass, why that medium?

RM: For many years I wanted to make classical metal busts in my formal language that referenced antiquity. I made the brass sculptures at Kohler's Arts/Industry residency in their factory last summer in Sheboygan Wisconsin. This residency assisted me in helping the work come to fruition. It was one of the only places that could facilitate my very limited understanding of foundry work. Artists work in the factory and use materials that are innate to Kohler's line of products- porcelain, cast-iron or brass among other things. I ended up using brass because of the similarities to Bronze and precious metals. This residency is incredibly special in that the artist works on the factory floor with knowledgeable associates who help to problem solve according to what you want the work to accomplish.



KH: What tone or mood do you feel the medium provides these pieces?

RM: I'm hoping that the brass pieces feel elevated and that there is a clear reference to the infinite historical and formal contexts of brass sculpture- how laborious, intensive and involved the process is. When I look at the sculptures I am astonished at how many hands it graciously takes to realize these works and I hope translates to others as well.

It was always my intention to take the weighty history that is imbued and innate to metalwork and make the forms light-hearted, tongue in cheek, overtly sexual, pitiful or one-liners that mix high and low- always my favorite intention.

KH: How did the bush-like pieces come to be? Those really stood out.

RM: The flower bouquet sculptures came out of my frustration of sculpting towards the end of my residency; I wanted to draw and make something very fast but still in my vocabulary.

The foundry technician told me to draw into the resin-bonded sand mold with a Dremel tool- we poured the brass and the bouquets sit on the pour cup which the molten brass fills up to. It was a fun and relieving experiment that yielded one of my favorite results I've ever made.

KH: Has your distance from New York City influenced your practice?

RM: I went to graduate school at Pratt Institute and lived in New York for years afterward. While it was incredible to live there, it wasn't financially sustainable for me and in many other ways. I deeply value driving a car, slowness, time and space- all of which I'm able to access a little more when I'm not in the city. I visit New York at least once a month no matter where I am. Ultimately, I would like to land in a place where I can have the best of both worlds- the rural and still have access to larger urban areas.

KH: While preparing work for *Town and Country* did you rely upon friends or colleagues to help critique works in progress? Do you like to work alone, communally, or collaboratively?

RM: I am very much a lone wolf when it comes to my studio practice.

I usually need fewer voices as I'm developing a body of work. There are a few close people that I reach out to with questions when I need it but it's usually helpful to work out problems by myself. I typically know what needs to be done and have my own line of questioning. That being said, I deeply need a creative community and it is incredibly important for me to have one and participate.

KH: What Does your creative community look like?

RM: It is incredibly important to me to be able to reach out to people and communicate in very tangible ways and social media, especially Instagram, allows me to do that. Instagram is my creative community- keeping up with old friends, making new ones- in fact, many of my relationships with people start on social media and they develop into very real friendships. It is a one stop shop to ask questions, see work, share and receive support, ask for help on and on. I have leaned on many people to help me realize my work and keep my sanity, especially brilliant artist and humans Breanne Trammell, Katie Parker and Guy Michael Davis who make up Future Retrieval, Brock Dent, Stephen Eakin and Heather Garland and insurmountable others that I have met as a visiting artist and lecturer at institutions that not only helped me realize my own work but also filled my heart with camaraderie and friendship, which is about as much of my dream creative community that I can ever ask for.



Town and Country will be on view at Asya Geisberg, 537b West 23rd Street, until November 2nd, 2019.