

Koak

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Koak's Breaking the Prairie*

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EDITORIAL

Koak's Breaking the Prairie

December 30, 2018

"Wilderness Pruned became the prison of spirit...Home as a heat-trap filled with centuries of clenched jaws and crossed legs, little gasps and grabs."

– Koak, *Breaking the Prairie* exhibition text

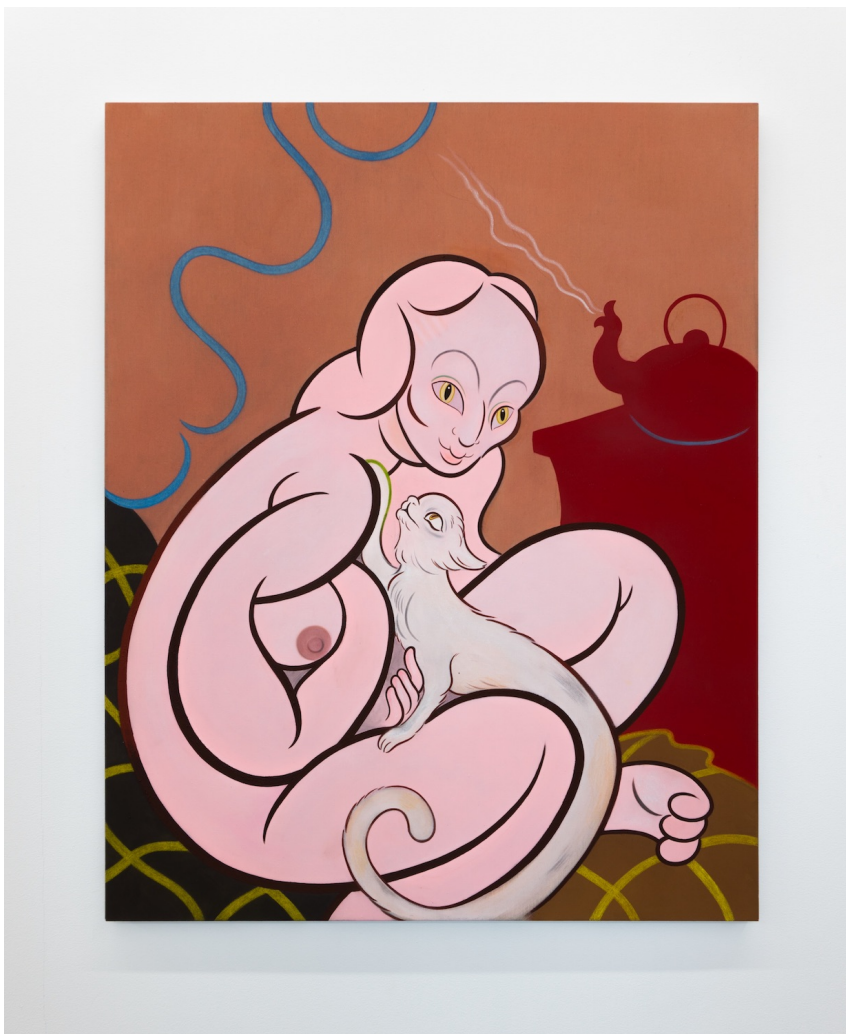


Modesty, 2018, Solid maple, optium plexiglass, plexiglass, metal hardware, enamel paint, and 22 drawings on rag paper dyed with acrylic ink drawn in graphite, charcoal, chalk, ink and casein, 82 x 75 x 23 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Phillip Maisel

Koak paints the modern day American Gothic, the Midwestern woman on the verge. Bold black lines and mood-colouring depict female figures writhing, gnawing, and bringing the axe down. Taking her title from Grant Wood's 1930s mural *Breaking the Prairie*, Koak's new exhibition is a reaction to a long history of men breaking nature. Wood's Depression-era Public Works of Art projects serve as fodder for the Trump-era painter, with their focus on Midwest masculinity, agriculture, and economically-motivated American isolationism. Described as a "shy bachelor," the closeted Grant Wood imagined the prairies as an Americana utopia filled with musclemen toiling the land, stamping out any trace of femininity. Koak picks up here, breaking down her own version of the prairie, the dead dream of Americana, the confined housewife. Stylistically, Koak's extreme distortions summon the inner realities of 1930s German Expressionism. The demonic figure in Koak's *Hiss* evokes visions of female-induced insanity in the 1930's Expressionist film *Der blaue Engel*, *The Blue Angel*, in which a man is driven into a straightjacket by his sexually liberated wife. *Breaking the Prairie* is on view at [Ghebaly Gallery](#) until January 19th. – Claire Milbrath



Breaking the Prairie, 2018, Oil, acrylic, pigment, pastel, chalk, and graphite on stretched linen mounted to panel, 95 x 68 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Phillip Maisel



Hiss, 2018, Acrylic, pigment, pastel, chalk, graphite, and casein on stretched linen, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Phillip Maisel

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Claire Milbrath
30 December, 2018



Installation view, *Breaking the Prairie*. Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Jeff Mclane



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Holding Tender, 2018, Oil, ink, acrylic, pigment, pastel, chalk, graphite, and casein on stretched linen mounted to panel, 86 x 62.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ghebaly Gallery. Photo: Phillip Maisel

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