

**Kara JOSLYN**

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Kara Joslyn: Art as an Act of Deception*

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[Kara Joslyn](#) is an artist specialising in storytelling and illusion. Previously showcased in eleven solo shows in the US, she just opened her first solo exhibition in New York. Her style heavily leans on the contrast between black and white, twisting mythology and dream-like scenes into spaces in-between fiction and non-fiction, both appealing and unsettling. We talked to her about her inspirations, her use of colour, and her new New York exhibit *This Is Hardcore*, on view at Perrotin New York from March 5 – April 16.

**You have said that you draw inspiration from 1950s paper craft books. What originally drew you to these as source material?**

I stole a 1950s craft book from my grandpa's not long after doing a project with Triple Take Holography Studio on an MFA science/art Grant. It was my grandma's book and from the year my dad was born. Pretty cool, right? I wanted to connect my experience learning to make holograms back to my studio practice and painting.

To make a hologram, you have to paint an object with white paint, so it reflects a laser light enough to be captured in the special emulsion. Much like these paper sculptures, all my paintings are folk or kitsch objects in black space with dramatic light. Artists talk a lot about their relationship to accident. For me, my significant accidents don't happen on the canvas itself, but in conceptualising, finding things that I believe hold meaning. That I can

use to convey meaning. Much like icon of Claymation, Gumby, I am a character who frequently jumps into books as worlds.

**Once the figures in these books are removed from the context of their time-period (such as advertisements) they begin to appear almost as absurd echoes of society. In general, your work merges the old and new. Why do you feel it is important to revisit this particular subject matter through a contemporary lens?**

It's insane to me that in the past people made these paper sculptures in this rather serious, yet playful way, or as an activity to do with kids at home. Imagine not binge-watching shows, going on Instagram, playing video games, shopping online, etc. It situates the present moment in a science-fiction-as-reality way because we are truly future humans, now. Physical books of images have always seemed like anthropological objects to me. I see these books as unofficial stories of the past, revealing the lives and imaginaries of the ever-so-mythic Mid-century American Capitalism.

The authors and the sculptors behind these how-to books range from professors to housewives to window dressers, to children. Whether its art, ads or homemade holiday decor, they sample from Art History, often with a cubist / constructivist flavour of Modernism reminiscent of the 20th century movements in Europe and Latin America, and also share similar narrative depictions to that of myth-based art history and parables. Author Dodie Bellamy says, "in the contest of 'imagination versus reality,' I am drawn to 'versus.'" I don't draw things from life or make them up. I appropriate images and paint them to trick the eye. My mum is a hypnotherapist and clinical psychologist, and my dad is a geneticist, so I am deeply indoctrinated into an interest in spelunking in Plato's cave by going into the shadow, viewing memories as imprint, and analysing the past as a residual influence aka DNA. Objects and places can accumulate and tell meaningful stories because they live long lives. I am, indeed, looking for an echo in the cave.

**You often employ the stark contrast between black and white in your work, using mythology to create narratives in-between fiction and non-fiction. Can you tell us a bit about your decision to work in black and white and how colour factors into your practice and the mythologies you portray?**

Materially I was always into drawing, graphite, photocopying with black toner, and have worked with holograms, magnetic sand, mercury quicksilver, frottage style collage and mineral particulate. When I was in undergrad and I first saw the Ed Ruscha gunpowder drawings, it felt like a door to a new room had opened. I always want materials to have a conceptual quality even though I want to make images or paintings. Black and white specifically connotes the idea of time itself, when used in painting versus in photography. Is it nostalgic for the past, or is it timeless? Is it referential to drawing or photography? My Gemini mind loves a mercurial "both, and" situation.



Gotta Get Away from Me, 2022

**Another trademark of your work is using car-paint pigments and airbrush. This adds a holographic feeling and gives your artworks a digital-like illusion, suspended somewhere between organic and computerised. Where did your fascination with illusion stem from?**

The grey-glittering and colour-shift pigments I make into airbrush paint stem from technology originally invented by Optical Coating Laboratories, where my grandpa worked. In a way, he was the Don Draper of Santa Rosa, CA at the beginning of the tech version of the Wild West, here in California. He grew up working on a farm in the Great Depression, didn't know his dad - no one in my family will ever know who the hell Joslyn is or why his mom put that name on his birth certificate. American tales. His company invented what is called "thin film" technology - it's part of making holograms, polaroid cameras, the reflective front on astronaut helmets, and what makes your iPhone lens have a purple sheen. These pigments felt personal to me, which, I thought was really fucking weird and made me feel futuristic. But was also kind of a nightmare comedy. The personal is political. The process I use to paint was taught to me by an old-school graphic designer who began his career pre-computers— This technique is meant to tell lies. It was invented to be photographed and shrunk down to look like no human hand ever touched it. When people first started seeing my work on Instagram, they mistook it for something made on a computer. I love the confusion of it all, but it's also why I use shift-pigments that you can only experience in reality.

In my generation, it reversed – people paint in a way that copies software. Little do they know, their hand-style is the O.G. way. I grew up with a black and white Macintosh in the late 80s and baby Kara drew on there for hours in MacDraw. My CV has CCA Art School,

Columbia, UC San Diego - but really taking Graphic Design at community College, and The San Diego Boys and Girls Club are where I learned to paint. When I was 11 my mum said I couldn't just lay around the house all summer long and enrolled me in an airbrush class. Thanks, mum!

**There is a very specific use of lighting in your work, which adds to the illusion. Can you talk to us a little about the Caravaggio inspired lighting you use – how you achieve this and what feeling you hope it will convey to viewers?**

Uncanny Allegory! Shadow! Time! (Queue Bowie - anything pre-Diamond Dogs era). Ok, now that I've set the mood: I think of the light in my paintings as moonlight. I don't apply any white paint, instead, I paint on canvas like drawing on a piece of paper. It's a challenge to paint like a drawing because if I over-paint, I lose the light. It's nice to have stakes.

White Gesso or the blank canvas white is literally made out of marble dust. Light reflects off smooth sanded marble dust in a special way. In this way, paintings can be like the moon. The moon is the Earth's shared cosmic muse. Like a painting, the moon has a surface made of reflective dust that glows by reflecting the light of the sun. The moon sits in black space, and produces no light of her own. myth scholar, Caroline W. Casey would say that, "everything symbolic is everything real" - and painting, at its heart, is about describing light...using dirt. If you can imagine a space between Caravaggio or Artemisia Gentileschi's Baroque chiaroscuro paintings, and the California Light and Space Artists (Robert Irwin and the gang) – that is where I would like to situate my work.



No Doves Fly Here, 2022

**In your newest exhibition *This Is Hardcore*, which is on view through April 16 at Perrotin New York, you focus on the figure of the muse – mythological spirits best known as Renaissance women wielding harps and lyres, empowering creativity. When did your interest in the muse begin, and why did you select this theme as the basis for this new body of work?**

I hate headphones – I want to hear music loud! When you feel the soundwaves hit your body, you get to experience a magical invisible force moving through you. Every person has a heartbeat - it's one of the conditions of existence. The muses are said to be spirits that take possession of a person when they are singing, dancing, and feeling it hard – I loved learning that because it could describe sound waves themselves, and resembles the idea of demonic possession – but instead of something to fear, it's how we share beauty, pain and joy with other people. The highest form of art, perhaps?

For me, I love an art historical makeover and I can use these images to reimagine stories that I don't like from Art History. I was looking at renaissance paintings of the muses, they were pretty tame. Always a better party in ancient and pagan art.

In *This is Hardcore*, I focused on opening up the allegory of “the cosmic dance of creation and destruction.” The entry to the CERN particle collider has a statue depicting The Shiva Nataraja, an incarnation who mythically created music so he would have something to dance to whilst creating the universe. It's called The Cosmic Dance of Creation and Destruction. Physicists agree that this metaphor allegorises and even accurately describes the nature of all matter in the universe. T.Rex's *Cosmic Dancer* lyricises this scientifically accurate myth and even nods to reincarnation; “I danced myself right out the womb/ I danced myself into the tomb / and then again, once more.”

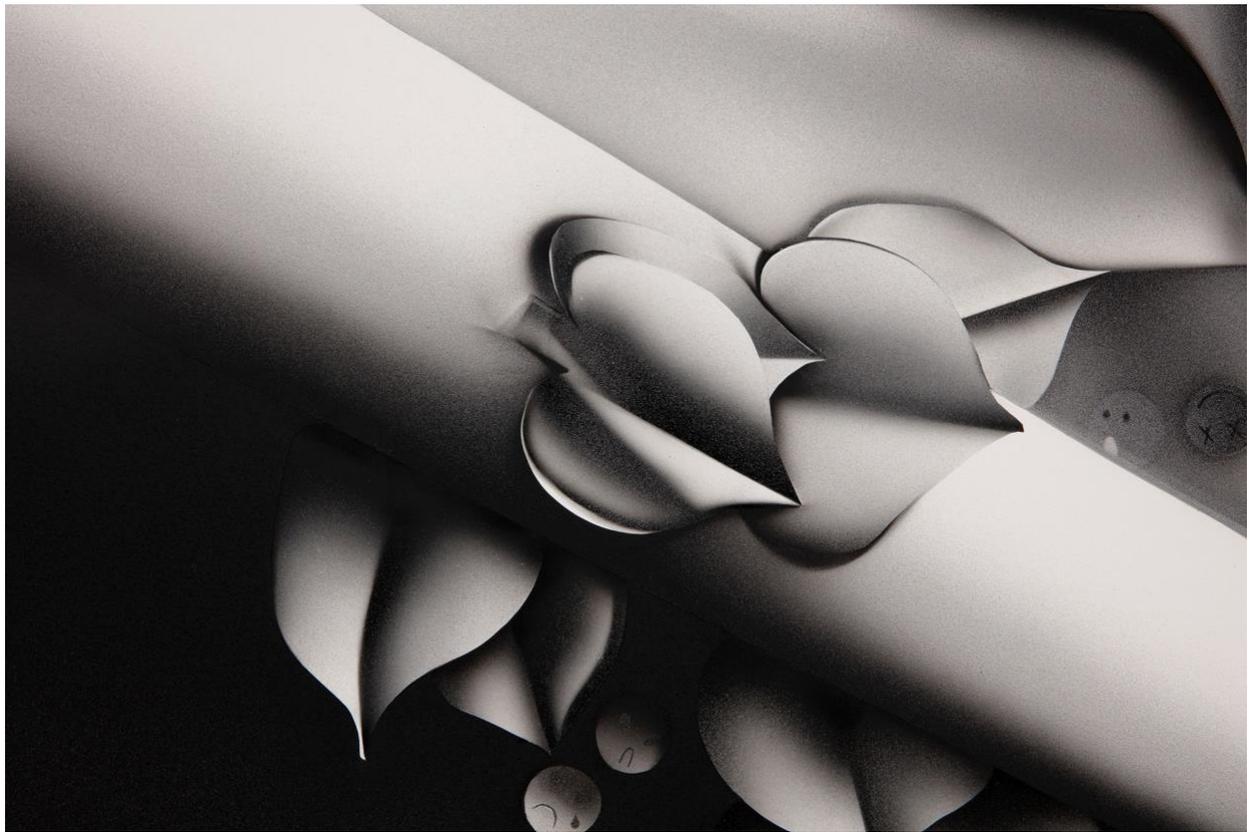
Crystallised in a painting I titled after the above mentioned T. Rex song, you see a Dandy with too many arms like shiva, and glam rock boots, playing a guitar and tipping his hat to a blue bird, delivering a scroll message to him. The paintings are not illustrations of muses personified, I'm breaking with the tradition of those aforementioned Renaissance approaches. In the 8-foot painting, titled *Gotta Get Away From Me*, curtains frame a scene with an owl and a mouse having a tense predator-prey moment, inspired by Lewis Hyde's book, *Trickster Makes this World* in which the trickster evolves to become neither predator nor prey - but the one who is cunning enough to steal the bait from a trap. When putting a show together, I approach it like a resonance or a vibe – like making an album where each painting is a song or track.

**What are you working on next? Will you continue exploring themes of storytelling and mythology?**

I am working on a bunch of exciting shows and projects! If you want to see, keep up with [@karavaggio](#). I am a total wanna-be myth scholar. Their belief is that the neurological science behind how humans remember facts and create knowledge systems, is ironically, through fiction. Fiction, art, and song — stories. If photography is the false index- the truth that tells a lie, I like to think of painting as the trick - the lie that tells the truth. Perhaps artists are at their best when playing the trickster and or redeemer. I think of storytelling as a continual subject of study and also a verb for myself as an artist. Don't be like The Little Mermaid and give away your voice. Or you'll turn to sea foam.



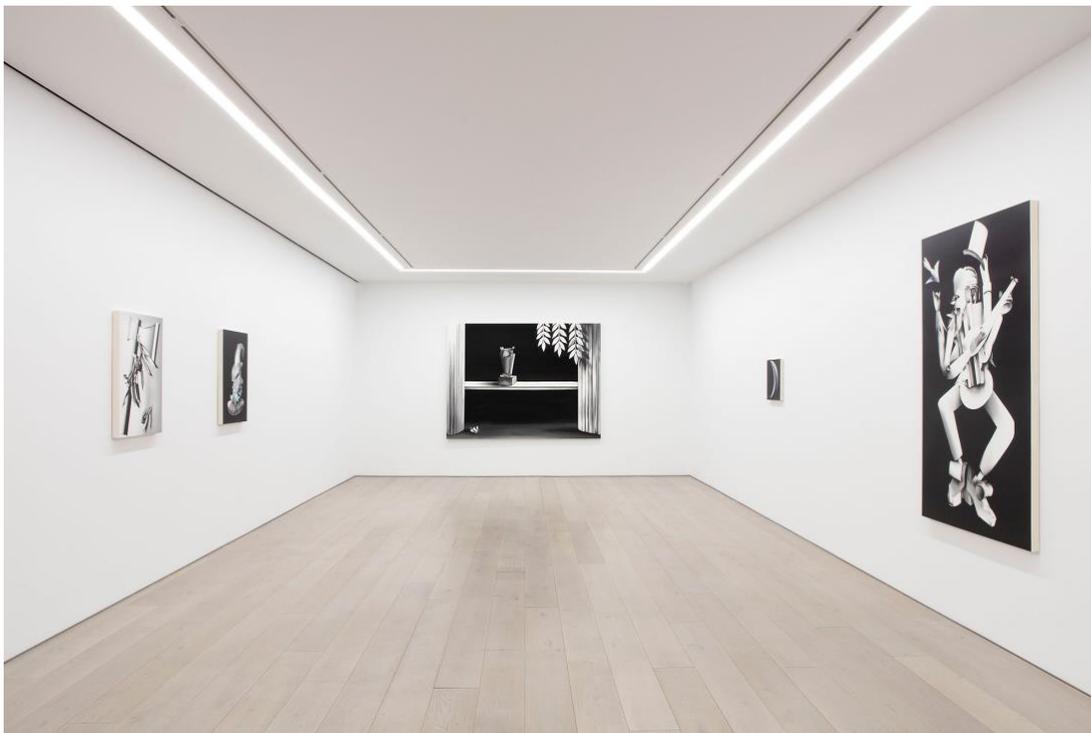
Cosmic Dancer (I danced myself right out the womb, I danced myself into the Tomb, and then again, once more), 2022



No Doves Fly Here (detail), 2022



Alone Again Or (detail), 2022



Installation View of Kara Joslyn: This Is Hardcore! at Perrotin New York, 2022

**Words** Eve McIntosh  
**Photos**  
Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin