

PRESSBOOK

Jesse MOCKRIN

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Two of the works on view in the artist Jesse Mockrin's upcoming solo show at Night Gallery, both from 2015: "Bloom" (left) and "Comes in Colours Everywhere." Courtesy of Night Gallery

One Young Artist's 21st-Century Baroque

By Kat Herriman | March 9, 2016

The work in the Los Angeles-based artist Jesse Mockrin's upcoming solo show at Night Gallery, "The Progress of Love," looks pointedly familiar — and yet entirely new. Her saturated oil paintings involve a healthy dose of pastiche, borrowing from late-Baroque masters, including Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Francois Boucher.

In some works, the references are literal — one of Mockrin's works borrows directly from Fragonard's "The Swing." Others, like a partial portrait called "The Forest," seize on aspects of paintings from that period (in this case, the title of a Boucher landscape) without attempting to mimic it. "I'm always seeing these images out of their original context — I'm usually looking at these 17th-century paintings while I'm on the Internet," the painter says. "It's what allows me to collage together things from the past and the present. It enables them to inhabit the same space."

The new exhibition shares traits with Mockrin's last body of work, which focused on gestural hands and shadowy portraits. "I was working in this black space for the past couple of years, where the characters were cropped and placed on top of a black background, but now there is a lot more color and texture," she says. "I thought of those paintings as negative space; now it's more about positive space." Replacing her signature void with a cornucopia of leaves, fabrics and flowers, Mockrin traded one chore for another. "You have no idea how labor-intensive those black paintings were. It was maddening to make layer after layer," Mockrin laughs. "Turns out painting fabric is also incredibly difficult, but it's a different kind of labor." A close look at Mockrin's work reveals the tiny strokes that go into rendering each detail — a practice she shares with Boucher and Fragonard.



Mockrin, Courtesy of Night Gallery

To make the images her own, the artist swapped the saccharine palette of the old masters for a moodier one, creating a tension between sweetness and bitterness that plays out across her panels. Evoking the precision of painter Ellen Altfest and the "femmes" of the '70s art icon Miriam Schapiro, Mockrin's paintings push symbols of domestic life into the realm of the surreal. "I think one of the things that drew me to Rococo is the fluidity of gender," Mockrin says. While most of her subjects have feminine features, in the past they've been largely male. "Sometimes people have a hard time telling," she says. "It's that slippage." With her whimsical characters and lush backgrounds, the artist sweeps the viewer into a fantastically ambiguous realm, where time and sexuality fold in on themselves to form something curiously new.