

***Legs Straight Up:
Maria Prainito-Winczner
at Detroit Contemporary***

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This exhibition by Maria Prainito-Winczner presents thirty individual works that collectively demonstrate the artist's longstanding dedication to material and symbolic indulgence. Whether relatively grand or somewhat modest in scale, each canvas is packed with information and eager to be read. They are vibrating like dancers hovering in space, defying the limits of the square while, of course, honoring its history. Maria is a painter now. She has established herself as one over a decade ago and has sustained a loyalty to the medium ever since. This came after a brief period of exploration within the realms of video and performance art, and although she is no longer working in that way, the same themes emerge now as they did back then. Without the desire to box it in, I would say that her work has, and still does, function reliably as a contemplation of etiquette and its turbulent rapport with authenticity. In *Legs Straight Up* at Detroit Contemporary, this probing looks both inside and around before manifesting in compositions of untamed beasts and joyous overgrowth. Wild splashes and strokes of color seen from afar become amalgamations of crudely rendered figures and symbols up close. Historical and contemporary archetypes are employed in a way that is chaotically free in an attempt to communicate her experience living as a human in the 21st century.



Emotional Support Animal with Birds, 60x48, Oil on Canvas, 2022.



Emmef Efatel, 60x48, Oil on Canvas, 2021.

The fact that the vibe of each composition swings so easily from anxiety inducing to absolutely liberating underscores the thin line between the two, especially in the United States where acceleration is in the blood. We exist in a composite of endless cultural, religious, gender, and sexual variations that are communicating through memes and emojis. The amount of curiosity and adaptation required to be truly present mirrors the demands of a high-speed sport that leaves stars and casualties on the field. This hyperactive reality is represented from painting to painting in the show, as if the artist is trying to record the subconscious process of interpretation, moment by moment by moment. Maria sees symbols as form and forms as symbolic the way critics and psychologists do. She recognizes the influence that conceptual languages of Jung and Deleuze continue to have on the creation of meaning in Western culture and takes advantage of their far-reaching agency. Refreshingly, here, we can rely on the horses to symbolize power and the cats to symbolize independence while the loosely drawn emojis fill in the gaps as prosthetic expressions of a disembodied voice.



Pink, Red, Brown, 12x12, Mixed Medium, 2020.

Feminine bodies show up in the show as distortions of the self who is seeking a release from all types of control. They are as shameless in their nudity, pose and behavior as any feminist would be. The relevance of this work in terms of the history of art is shaped by its conversation with both abstract expressionism and feminism simultaneously. The history of art made by women like Lee Krasner was acknowledged as a parallel reality to the Art History found in the textbooks, but women kept making art, nonetheless. Maria Prainito-Winczner came up in the 1990s with feminists of the third wave, who perpetuated the second wave's outward frustration with patriarchal values and aggression. Their work was performative, emphatic and noisy as a way of challenging the woman's traditionally docile role and insist on receiving recognition for their physical AND cultural contributions.



Dance, 60x48, Oil on Canvas, 2024.

Whether intentional or not, Maria's childlike approaches to material application references fellow Gen X painters like Cecily Brown and Jutta Koether. Although neither of these artists identify solely as feminists, both of them clearly embrace womanhood as essential aspects of their practice. Similarly, Maria Prainito-Winczner applies automatist techniques of Surrealism and Expressionism to access her subconscious and draw out personal fears and joys, which in the end, reveal nothing but a highly complex reality filled with infinite truths that are stifled by the need to define.



Flirtation, 60x48, Oil on Canvas, 2024.

Legs Straight Up by Maria Prainito-Winczner opened at Detroit Contemporary on September 7th and will close on September 29th, 2024.

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