

A watercolor portrait of a woman with short, light blue hair. She has a serious expression, looking slightly to the left. Her eyes are dark with blue and purple tones. Her lips are painted a vibrant red. The background is a mix of light yellow and green washes. The overall style is soft and painterly.

Marine Contemporary

005

Stephanie Pryor
Domina



Essay

Claressinka Anderson

The first time I saw Stephanie Pryor's work, it was hanging on the wall at someone's house. It was an intimate, layered and predominantly abstract painting of birds. I found myself drawn to it, as it was both wildly colorful and heart-crushingly dark. It spoke to me on an emotional level, a palpable darkness pulsating below the surface of vivid color. I knew immediately that I had to do a studio visit with her. At the time, Pryor was going through a period of transition with her work, moving from abstraction to representation, particularly to figuration. Those first fledging experiments were more of a tentative exploration into new territory, but in the last few years, she has refined her study of the figure and now makes highly accomplished and lyrical paintings of women.

Pryor started off as an abstract painter, but was prompted to make the jump to representation because of a "sense of exhaustion." She explains, "I was making so much work, but not reflecting on what I was doing. It became stylized and wasn't serving any purpose." Observing how her work has progressed over the years, that comment makes perfect sense, as though undoubtedly raw and beautiful, the abstract works could not ultimately serve her interest in blurring the line between abstraction and representation both physically and psychologically. There needed to be something in her process as an artist, which allowed her to reference the poignancy of the human condition and bring that psychological exploration to the foreground of her work.

It is interesting to note that Pryor's first foray into representation was through the depiction of wild animals. Even though they are sometimes barely decipherable on canvas, their presence is deeply felt. It is almost as if their visual subtlety makes their energy more forceful and haunting. Like the person walking down an empty hallway in a

horror movie, it is the presence of what is not there - the implied - that has the power, not what is actually seen. "Rather than drifting into focus, hovering on the threshold of perceptibility and then quietly vanishing into the background, each beast explodes into consciousness like a shotgun blast on a silent winter morning. Pryor's wolves, bears, deer and horses do not go gently into the night. They howl, roar and stampede as if fighting, tooth and nail, against their disappearance from a toxic world," writes David Pagel in the LA Times about this particular body of work. From a psychological standpoint, the more humans suppress and repress emotions, the more raw and violent they become. Pryor's interest in animals could be seen as representations of psychological states of being and facets of the human condition. There is something to be looked at here in terms of her work; on the surface, these paintings are ethereal, even whimsical, yet also discernibly and viscerally disquieting.

It seems a natural progression that Pryor would move on to make paintings of humans, particularly of women in various states of vulnerability and strength. *Domina* is Pryor's first solo exhibition with the gallery. For this new body of work, Pryor has been looking at old master paintings, particularly 16th Century Venetian paintings. Pryor's most recent portraits of women are inspired by paintings of courtesans from this period, such as Giorgione's *Portrait of a Courtesan*. The title of the show comes from the Latin phrase "*Domina Domina*," which translates as mistress, dame, lady or she who rules. In old English law, it was a title formerly given to noble ladies who owned estates on their own, separate from men. This Latin root went on to form the words *dominate* and *dominatrix*. Pryor's work is also undoubtedly influenced by Karen Klimnick and Elizabeth Peyton, those contemporary masters of conceptualism and



Cupid
2010, acrylic on watercolor paper
stretched over linen, 48" x 36"



Dream
2009, acrylic on canvas over panel
48" x 36"

realism. Along with Pryor, these are artists that serve the culture they are trying to capture through the idea of the "iconic" portrait.

Pryor's background as an abstract painter gives her a trained eye when it comes to the formal aspect of painting. She is very aware of the ground and structure of painting or what Pryor calls the "sculpture" of the composition. These are qualities that are rooted in abstraction. This eye for structure and balance, together with a deep and obvious passion for beauty, brings the work a dream-like, seductive quality. Whether the final image stems from source material such as nature, fashion, self-portraiture or photography, Pryor is interested in the unfolding of an expression or moment in time: one that is subject to change during the duration of painting. Pryor paints like a watercolorist, using layered, thin washes of watery acrylic in brooding and vivid colors. The final painting is always the result of an intuitive process of layering color to define image and to form new shapes and areas that aren't apparent in the original drawing, but come across during a more meditative period of observation. As a result, these gestural acrylics are concurrently impulsive and considered. The women in Domina are charming, enigmatic, sexy, pensive, lonely, playful, powerful, submissive, sad, broken and removed. On the surface, their lure is seductive, but there is a depth to the characters that runs under the canvas, like blood under skin: savage, dark and full of poetic beauty.

Stephanie Pryor

b. 1971. Great Lakes, Illinois, USA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

Recent Solo Exhibitions include:

2011

— Domina, Marine Contemporary,
Los Angeles, CA

2007

— Wilderness, ACME. At Domestic,
Los Angeles, CA

Recent Group Exhibitions include:

2011

— Metallic, Post Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Chain Letter, Shoshana Wayne Gallery,
Santa Monica, CA

2010

— Marine Salon No. 5,
Santa Monica, CA (catalog)

2009

— Curator's Choice Recent Acquisitions
from MMoCA's Collection. Madison, WI

2008

— Scene/Seen Recent Acquisitions from the
Luckman Fine Arts Permanent Collection
1979-2006, Calstate, Los Angeles

Pryor is a recent recipient of the 2011 CCI ARC grant (formerly known as the Durfee ARC Grant), and featured in the September 2011 edition of Modern Painters: "The Best 100 Fall Shows". She has shown extensively in the States and internationally. Select public collections include MMoCA (Madison, WI), Creative Artist Agency (Los Angeles) and Deutschebank Kunst (Frankfurt, Germany).



Wolfinhabited
2007, acrylic on panel
15" x 20"



Wilderness 2
2010, ink and acrylic on panel,
7" x 5"



Deer Couple
2007, acrylic on panel
48" x 36"



Domina
2011, acrylic on panel
24" x 18"



First Lady
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 10"



Gild
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 18"



Bleeding Heart
2011, acrylic on panel,
36" x 24"



Lounge
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 10"



Broken
2011, acrylic on panel,
10" x 8.25"



Flowergirl
2011, acrylic on panel,
9.5" x 7"



Arrowhead
2011, acrylic on panel,
7.5" x 7"



Meadow
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 16"



Long Goodbye
2011, acrylic on panel,
36" x 24"



Ballroom
2011, acrylic on panel,
14" x 11"



Boxer
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 18"



Sunbather
2011, acrylic on panel,
36" x 24"



Gymnast
2011, acrylic on panel,
10" x 9.25"



Indian
2011, acrylic on panel,
9.25" x 7"



Forest
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 18"



Georgia
2011, acrylic on panel,
9.25" x 10"



Ladyluck
2011, acrylic on panel,
9.25" x 10"



Madame Butterfly
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 10"



Lover
2011, acrylic on panel,
16" x 12"



Valentine
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 16"



Flapper
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 10"



Priestess
2011, acrylic on panel,
10" x 9.25"



Arabesque
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 36"



Nature's Course
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 36"



Teacher
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 18"



Veil
2011, acrylic on panel,
10" x 9.25"



Waterfall
2011, acrylic on panel,
10" x 8.25"



Queenie
2011, acrylic on panel,
24" x 18"



Singer
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 16"



Bluejean
2011, acrylic on panel,
12" x 16"



Domina
Installation



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Stephanie Pryor
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