

W

The Artists Picking Up Where the Surrealists Left Off

For a new generation of figurative painters, reality is best processed through a fantastical lens.



Katja Seib, photographed in her Los Angeles studio, with *A Picknick Inside*, 2021.

Hair and makeup by Zaheer Sukhnandan for Face Atelier; courtesy of the artist, Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Château Shatto, Los Angeles.

Some of the artists working in this spirit, like María Frago and Dominique Fung, are openly and at times playfully paying homage to their Surrealist predecessors. For others, like Jill Mulleady, [Naudline Pierre](#), and Katja Seib, the similarities are less consistent and maybe less conscious, reflecting instead explorations of spirituality, alchemy, or metamorphosis-rich mythology. “Artists today are rediscovering forms of knowledge or epistemologies that aren’t the Western ones. There is also an interest in the occult—magic is in the air,” said the curator Cecilia Alemani, who has titled her upcoming group exhibition for the 2022 Venice Biennale “The Milk of Dreams,” after a book by Carrington.

by **Jori Finkel**

Photography by **Molly Matalon**

03.08.22



Seib's *Mona Lisa's Smile*, 2020.

More than Mulleady, Seib puts symbols and spiritual tools directly into some of her works, in the form of fortune tellers, mirrors, and tarot cards. Her scenes tend to be rendered realistically, but contain impossible moments. In one, a weary-looking woman sits at a table where a vase acts like a crystal ball, delivering a vision: a dark-haired girl in the glass. Stranger yet, that image casts a reflection on the table, which takes the form of the *Mona Lisa*. In a related piece, a pale woman sits alone at a desk with a blank notebook, while a serpent on the jungle mural behind her seems to spring out at her. “I think loneliness is a big theme for me,” said Seib, who shows with the gallery Château Shatto in L.A. “Feeling very helpless and vulnerable, that’s a major part of my work.”