

SARA ANSTIS

Pencil of Rays

Exhibition runs from 7. May to 19 June 2021

Galerie Fabian Lang is proud to present **Sara Anstis: *Pencil of Rays***. Conceived over the last six months, the show brings together the largest body of work by the young Swedish/Canadian artist to date.

In Anstis's vivid, otherworldly pictures, powerful women frolic beneath a wide sky, torture each other, laze in the sun, read, draw, sleep and make love. They also commune with nature and various animals; in the main, trippy variations of dogs, mermaids and octopuses. A few years ago, they cavorted mainly by the sea, naked, bald and young, their vulvas and breasts enlarged, as if to accentuate their delight in their flesh and the possibilities of sexual pleasure. More recently, as if evoking humans, their hair and their bodies have grown and they have wandered inland. They have even started to wear a few items of clothing. In some drawings, they sport an unusual amount of limbs or long tube-like breasts; a woman might just as easily morph into a tentacular sea creature as ride a bicycle or read a book. In many of these situations, danger is a breath away: horror is intimated in fragments of narratives, like the half-remembered shards of dreams.

While very much of the moment Anstis's shape-shifting, elaborate and multi-layered new paintings – including soft pastel on paper and a rare work on canvas – are replete with references to art history, tales and myths. She takes their initial inspiration from stories such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and works such as Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (1445), the Madonna's breasts robust, moon-like; Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *Le Souvenir* (1778), in which a young woman carves her lover's initial into the bark of a tree; Carol Rama's *Movimento e immobilità di Birnam* (1977), which comprises bicycle inner tubes attached to a painting of a forest; and Paulo Uccello's *Niccolò Mauruzi da Tolentino at the Battle of San Romano* (c. 1438–1440), a dense composition of horses and men in a claustrophobic landscape. While very different from each other, gaze at them long enough and similarities materialize: in particular, the sense that realism has been scuppered for a heightened mood, feeling, atmosphere. Colours sing a strange song, communication is complicated, landscapes are as sensual as bodies – and the bodies themselves are curious transporters.

In *The Drawer* (all works 2020/21), for example, a lone woman draws on pieces of paper pinned to a tree; the dark night is illuminated by her glowing white face. The artist has turned Fragonard's composition on its head by replacing the lover's signature with intimate drawings: the focus here is the woman's inner life. Uccello's painting is also referenced – the soldiers' broken spears transformed into pencils.

Anstis's first, and main, love is soft pastel on heavy paper. She thinks of paper like skin: 'it remembers and it shows its history'. After covering the support with a coloured ground, she works the pigment into the paper with her fingers: lines are sharpened, shapes softened, tones ramped up to a hallucinogenic intensity. Formed from layers of pigment that the artist rubs away, the women's flesh is as polished as marble, while landscapes shimmer like mirages or feverish cartoons.

The artist adeptly visualises scenes in which humour is tempered by the risk of violence, playfulness and attraction with the invasion of personal space. In the last year, however, affected, like most people, with the enforced solitude of the pandemic, Anstis has relocated her women from the ocean to a landscape that is – literally and metaphorically – earthy and interior. In this new place, the women are preoccupied with discovering new ways of living, with themselves and with each other, with the land and with books and pencils – objects which, during long periods of isolation, have achieved a new resonance.

(Excerpt from '*Where are the Sharp Things: The Worlds of Sara Anstis*' by Jennifer Higgin, author and *Frieze* Editor at Large. Read the full essay in the special editions' catalogue which accompanies this exhibition.)

SARA ANSTIS

born 1991, Stockholm, Sweden. Lives in London, UK.

She received her BFA in Studio Art and Sociology at Concordia University (Montreal, CA) in 2013 and her MFA in Fine Art from Valand Academy (Gothenburg, SE) in 2016. In 2018, she completed the Drawing Year Postgraduate Programme at the Royal Drawing School (London, UK).

She has received grants from the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation (CA), Jerwood Arts (UK), and the Anna-Lisa Thomson foundation (SE) amongst others. Her recent body of work was developed over six months for the exhibition *Pencil of Rays* at Galerie Fabian Lang, Zürich (May 2021). The previous year she was at two seminal residencies: El Segundo Museum of Art (ESMoA), USA (July - September 2019) awarded by the Royal Drawing School, London and at Palazzo Monti x The Great Women Artists, Brescia, Italy (November - December 2019).

Her recent exhibitions include *Comings and Goings*, Sara Anstis and Neal Tait, Fabian Lang, Zurich, CH; *Discrete*, Nevven gallery, Gothenburg, SE (solo); *Canons*, Galerie Deroullion, Paris, France (group show); *Just As I Am*, 1969 gallery, NY, USA (group show); *Monster/Beauty: An Exploration of the Female/Femme Gaze*, Marcelle Joseph, London, UK (group show); *I want to feel alive again*, Lyles&King, New York, US (group show); *Transatlantico*, Palazzo Monti x Mana Contemporary, NJ, USA (group show); *The Self, The Work, The World*, Fabian Lang gallery, (Zurich, Switzerland), 2019 (group show); *Slip spill*, 650mAh (Hove and Brighton, UK), 2019 (group show); *Gestures of Comfort*, Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran (Montreal, CA), 2019 (group show); *BIG PAINTING*, Patrick Parrish Gallery (NYC, USA), 2019 (group show); *Den Tänkande Handen* (The Thinking Hand), the Royal Palace – Gustav III's Museum of Antiquities (Stockholm, Sweden), 2019 (group show).