



A WOMEN'S THING

Artist Suzanne Unrein's Paintings Share an Experience, Not a Story

October 19, 2020 by [Morgan Everhart](#)



SUZANNE UNREIN IN HER STUDIO. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.

Suzanne Unrein's references to mythology, art history, and personal experiences are reduced to instinct and good form. Her pursuit is almost purely about vivifying the evocative and those intentions are always clear. "It's about shedding inhibitions and sharing an experience, not a story."

I met Suzanne Unrein during a residency at Painting Space 122 in 2018. As a new artist in residence there, I quickly made the acquaintance of Unrein in the hallway and organized studio visits. I'm often surprised by how different people are from their artwork. However, Unrein and her work are undeniably striking, confident, and expressive.

During my first visit, it took me several minutes to see any of her personified or animal forms. I was first and foremost captivated by her use of gesture and color, which made me seriously question if I was experiencing synesthesia.

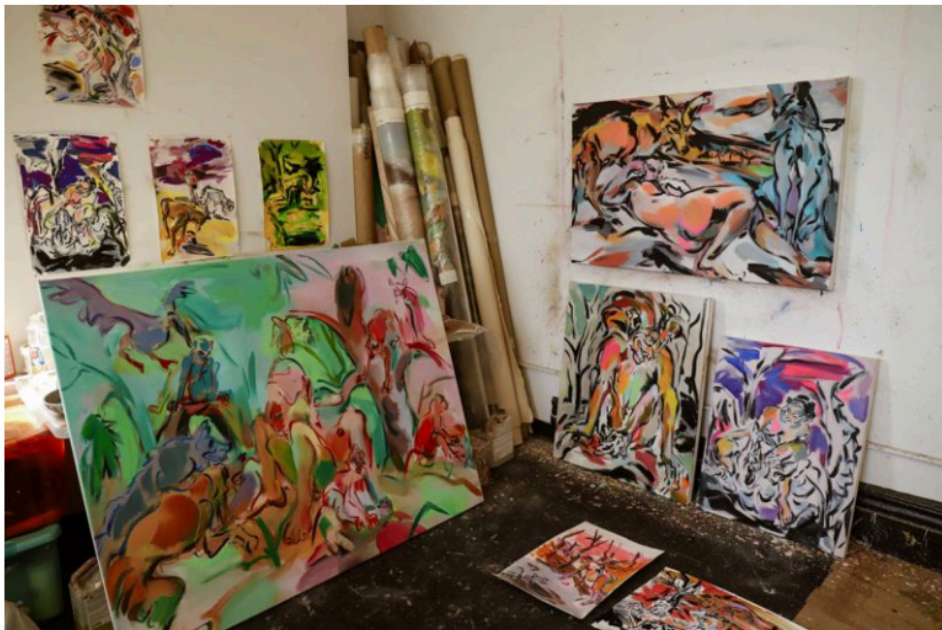


THE EASTER PARADE, SUZANNE UNREIN, OIL ON CANVAS, 53 X 72 INCHES. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.

In the chapter, "Perceptual Organization in Visual Art" by Jan. J. Koenderink, from The Oxford Handbook of Perceptual Organization, edited by Johan Wagemans, Koenderink references Unrein's paintings and says that art comes from the mystery in life. "Every vision suffices if you only tune into the presence of 'mystery' in everything. Nothing is absolutely clear. You cannot count the grains of sand beneath your feet, nor the leaves on the tree before you. What the painter paints is not the leaves, but a leafy, 'mysterious' texture. Therein lies the art". Here Wagemans also shares Unrein's work, where she writes, "I am less interested in the narrative than the emotions and forms that inspire the abstraction and movement. By combining my own personal experience with figures and mythologies from a variety of artists in a range of eras, I want to transport them from their original meaning into a contemporary presence of an image."



SUZANNE UNREIN FLIPPING THROUGH PAINTING SKETCHES ON PAPER IN HER EAST VILLAGE PS 122 STUDIO. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.



SUZANNE UNREIN'S EAST VILLAGE PS 122 STUDIO. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.

Running parallel to good, integrated form and color, Unrein's references of mythology, art history, and personal experiences are reduced to her instinct. That's something really special about Unrein. Her pursuit has been almost purely about the evocative, and the vivid. I find myself, as the viewer, feeling oddly comfortable at accepting her paintings at all moments of looking at them, because her intentions are always clear. "It's about shedding inhibitions and sharing an idea, not a story. I may be thinking about specific references, but you don't need to know them. I'm more interested in the emotional connection. A lot of historical and mythological references are lost from our contemporary dialogue but I find that revisiting them brings a certain poetry and mystery to my everyday life."

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Though Unrein may not mind if the viewer understands her references, those who love art history can see that Unrein has spent many years reflecting and expounding on the works and conversations of master painters. For example, Unrein will see Alexandre-Francois Desportes and Paul de Vos painting the same exact canines, so she'll incorporate them as well and frame them in a contemporary context. Unrein is becoming increasingly more interested in tying her subjects and their environments together through painting light and rhythm. If you look at her newest works, you'll see thicker, black gestures to define her figures, and more neon colors.



SUZANNE UNREIN NEXT ONE OF HER SELF PORTRAITS. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.

Maybe the most intimate painting in the studio references a part of Unrein's life that sparked her interest in overlapping personal and historical mythologies or, more specifically, depicting animals and one's primal desires. Coming from Florida, Unrein was surrounded by monstrous birds and alligators. She found the alligators both frightening and awe-inspiring. After an existential crisis, she went back to Florida and reflected on the wildlife there. During that time, an alligator would often visit the shoreline while she was outdoors. While contemplating moments like this, Unrein says, "I embrace an ecstasy about nature- the beauty and violence. I think about the damage we have done to non-human animals and the environment and what we could do to better co-exist."



LEFT: "THE PARTY," OIL ON CANVAS, 53 X 48 INCHES. RIGHT: "IN THE WHITE," OIL ON CANVAS, 53 X 72 INCHES. PHOTO BY MORGAN EVERHART.

Suzanne Unrein has recently exhibited with Mitte Projects in Miami, FL, Sara Nightingale Gallery in Sag Harbor, NY, and One Art Space in New York, NY. Right now, you can also see her work in "Reaction in Seclusion," which is an exhibition of drawings created in response to lockdown curated by Beatrice Hasell-McCosh. Unrein's work is also currently in the US Department of State's Art in Embassies program located in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.