

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Franklin Melendez, "Jill Mulleady," *Kaleidoscope*, Spring 2017

KALEIDOSCOPE

JILL MULLEADY

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BY FRANKLIN MELENDEZ

I'd like to imagine that in a previous life, Jill Mulleady had a stint as Jean-Martin Charcot, a gifted painter in his own right who traded artistic ambition for medical acclaim as the founder of modern neurology. Fortunately, the repressed always returns (or so postulated one of his more apt pupils), and perhaps he has come back to haunt her tableaux, a passenger spirit hitching a ride to the host of other *dramatis personae* she conjures into a spectral landscape both radiant and diffuse. Like the master of the Salpêtrière, she also assumes multiple, if conflicting roles: magician and anthropologist, expert scenographer and empirical observer, soothsayer and semiotician whose findings play out across contorted bodies and stylized postures thick with latent meaning. I mention this on one of our first visits—an insight she politely mulls before bracketing with a kind invitation for coffee.

Still, it is difficult to shake off the feeling when confronted by Mulleady's strange apparitions. Mythical monsters commingle with fairy tale creatures, enigmatic totems overlook unnatural fornications, doubles and doppelgangers refract one another into astral projections that are both psychologically laden and mystically estranged. In one recent bar scene, Jeanne D'Arc is reincarnated as Saint Michael vanquishing an alien embryo while a clone of Sylvia von Harden looks on, seemingly unperturbed, from her chalice of absinthe; above them, a flat screen glows with the image of an emaciated polar bear portending of global doom (*Kleptocracy*, 2016). In another, a lithe, androgynous youth smokes an e-cigarette while gazing intently into their reflection; in the background faceless bodies writhe sensuously, all nude save for one clad in nothing but bottle-green socks (*Prince S*, 2016).

Jill Mulleady (Argentinian, b. 1980) is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. She is represented by Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles, and Gaudel de Stampa, Paris.

Mulleady's upcoming solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern will be on view 30 May–23 July.

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Image: *Prince S*, 2016
Courtesy of the artist

These details linger, hazy but persistent. After-images that could easily be mistaken for clues to secret narratives remain locked within watery brushstrokes. But, of course, the mist never dissipates—and therein lies the rub. Rather than revelations, Mulleady cultivates obfuscation, rendering only fleeting glimpses and oracular visitations, as if dropping in on somebody else's prophetic dreams. Sometimes images are doubled or tripled in a deliberate game of pictorial déjà vu (*The Green Room I, II*, 2017); other times, rebus-like arrangements invite deciphering only to play red herring with ever-receding meaning; more uncanny still, the supranatural is pitted against the quotidian, as in a domestic still life whose banality renders the act of reading both poignant and strangely mute (*Spray La Vie*, 2016). One thing becomes increasingly clear across these various encounters: the endgame is less about deciphering the signs than simply recognizing the space they circumscribe: a fuzzy elsewhere where personal fantasy merges with cultural myth, desire slips into perversion, flesh becomes other than flesh.

Charcot would have found this terrain rife for interpretation—after all, he claimed to divine psychic affliction from the theatrical spasm of limbs. But Mulleady remains astutely resistant to the talking cure, offering in its stead a type of pictorial aphasia, witnessed but never explained by attendant shades summoned across time and space. Roaming among them are Fassbinder and Munch, Kippenberger and Melania, stags and sacred coyotes, policemen and divine androgynes bound in strange rituals of her own divining. If their communions open passageways into other worlds, it might only be to map the parallax of our own. ☺

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WHERE PERSONAL FANTASY
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HIGHLIGHTS