

## MOUSSE

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BY ANDREW BERARDINI

Andrew Berardini takes us on a voyage inside Jill Mulleady's otherworldly representations that combine heavenly peace and turbulent sensuality.

Jill Mulleady (1980) was born in Montevideo and lives in Los Angeles. For her last solo show, "Fear" at the National Archeological Museum in Naples she created a scent as a means to update the sensorial conditions of the museum. She's currently preparing her first solo show in Paris at Gaudel de Stamps & in Los Angeles at Freedman Fitzpatrick.

## The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Jill Mulleady

"The gates of hell are open night and day;  
Smooth the descent, and easy is the way..."  
— Virgil's *The Aeneid*, book 6. Translated by John Dryden

The verdant green hills fold and makes valley, narrowing along the meandering banks of the mossy river. The lushness of the grass fills with a menagerie of animals. The tiger and the leopard, tongues lolling, wrestle in the clear light watched dumbly by a dewy-eyed gray ox and a dignified stag. Beside a fat-bottomed fowl on the banks of the river, a unicorn sips from the waters, its long horn dipping below the waveless surface. A lemur casually rides an elephant and the startled monkey looks like he's been caught mid-mischief by the palm tree. Over all of them, mountainous in scale, a black-gowned woman with auburn hair drapes her body over a half-opened silver laptop twice her size, propped like a teepee, her palest white hands holding gossamer cords controlling a black-hooded demon ravishing a fair-maiden on the shore.

Beyond this tableau, the darkness closes in, the monsters with brilliant faces and misshapen bodies climb out of the shadows of ancient ruins and fresh imaginations. Two demons mount another maiden, a stubby legged little Mephistopheles fucks her face, while a colossal golem props her ass on his thick, stony thighs.

Go deeper. Do you smell that? The Devil might call it "fear" but it's the perfume made from scraping the oil and blood and dirt and sweat from the flesh of victorious gladiators fresh from their battles in the arena. Pliny the Elder describes its medicinal qualities and sometimes the staggering price of the stuff, but here, it diffuses like mists, the mud and blood and fear, the stink of adrenaline and sharpened iron, of leather and musk, coats everything. In its raw fetid odor, a dying body squirts out the last of its living blood into the shouts of the mob in the stands, marinating in sweat and red wine. All who smell this perfume wish to fight and fuck at the same time. Jill Mulleady attempted to bottle it for herself.

*The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1515) with its grassy pleasures easily leads to the divine retribution we'll receive for all the fun we thought we were having. The passage between paradise and hell in Bosch is only a patch of grass away, a panel over. The underworld or the afterlife, heaven and hell are just places to splash our fears and desires. These two wetly tangle and knot in all humans and never more so than we gaze into the beyond.

Here in the paintings, perfume, and installations of Jill Mulleady, there are creatures and tableaux, situations and rituals, eluding easy summarization or cheap interpretation. Heaven and hell are projections of fantasies, Mulleady layers them into single scenes. In the West, Christians peeled heaven from hell, the two separated and certainly not equal. We've traded out afterlives with each changing of the gods. The ancient animal-human hybrid deities were defeated by perfect Olympians and then pulverized into oblivion by the followers of a sweet-mouthed Aramaic Jew. Zeus' defeat of the Titans, Oedipus' outwitting of the Sphinx, these powerful chimerical creatures crashed into the rocks, were reduced to ornaments and tourist attractions. Though even Pan, one of the most beloved of the country gods, got gussied up to be the devil by village priests trying to shake out the ancient affection

for this lusty old goat and replace it with good clean Christian ardor. One hopes that goat-legged Pan is still out there in a mountain glade somewhere he can be freely worshipped, drinking and fucking with the abandonment he deserves. The Greco-Romans spirituality haunts our words and forms a collective mythology for Westerners, but it might be hard to muster a manger's worth of true believers.

The ancient legends still shudder their way through our lives. They prance and rut and splatter through the work of Jill Mulleady. Even as Jill worked abstractly for a long moment in her career (early and lately working primarily in figurative painting), they were backdrops to performances, sites of strange rituals, dreamy scenarios. Through a glass, darkly the strange figures and places that cavort in her paintings, all have a strange pallor of the otherworldly, even the brightest most domestic of things: a woman opening a book showing two different facing pictures of open valleys in her lap. The banality of the scene is somehow shot through with weird fertility symbols and alluring prospect of hot sex, all appear in Jill's bright, soft colors. Pre-Raphaelite colors, though nowhere near as fussy. And though early De Chirico gets a hard visual reference in *This is not a love song* (2016), the hazy, animal fantasies of literary Leonora Carrington and the gauzy dark eroticism of Odilon Redon feel much truer. Though bright and clear, its hard not to feel some gauze over your eyes staring deeply into these tableaux.

Modernity in Jill's work assents itself in almost comedic ways, the hard purity of a smart phone tucked into the wall behind an impossibly bent, single-booted woman with god knows what ready to tumble out of her cleanly flayed open torso in *Sex Murder* (2016), or the giant laptop; these hard planes inject the cold, corporate minimalism of late techno capitalism into a mix that is both goofy and jarring, like an alarm clock in the middle of pillow, erotic dream.

The interplay isn't between another world and this one, but a way of employing otherworlds to peer into this one. Slumberland, the divine, the supernatural, the metaphysical, I might even add the prognostications of tarot and astrology along with some of the Surrealists' favorite games, none of these have much empirical veracity but they offer a set of symbols, stories, legends that provoke reflection, introspection, and perhaps revelation. Reading your horoscope, you take a moment to examine your life to see how it might be true. Alongside a way to connect us to the power and beauty of cosmic forces, that moment of examination, search, and reflection is the true purpose of astrology.

Looking into Jill's works, I feel the artist touring what might lazily called surreal spaces, occupied by the weird shapes and wild animals in heavenly peace and devilish monsters in hellish sexual congress and modern technology almost like *Space Odyssey* stone monuments (a shape she twisted for the bottle of perfume), all the fantasy, anxiety, desire, and fear surging against the rules of polite society. The otherworldly that we can escape can only avoid the perverse effects of repression when given space to manifest. When one marries fear and desire as Jill does, the result is very dangerous and utterly alluring.

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

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THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL  
A. BERARDINI ON J. MULLEADY



*Origines culturelles et mythiques d'un certain comportement des dames romaines, 2015, "Fear" installation view at il Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Gaudel de Stampa, Paris. Photo: Fred Uyttenhove*

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*Riot II*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Gaudel de Stampa, Paris; KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin



*Riot III*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Gaudel de Stampa, Paris



*Riot I*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Gaudel de Stampa, Paris; KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin



*Origines culturelles et mythiques d'un certain comportement des dames romaines*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Gaudel de Stampa, Paris

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*Pussy Magic*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles

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*Sex Murder*, 2016. Courtesy: Gaudel de Stampa, Paris



*This is not a love song*, 2016. Courtesy: Gaudel de Stampa, Paris



*They Don't Care About Us*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin