

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Éric Troncy, "Jill Mulleady's Paintings Make Sparks Fly," *Art Basel*, January 18, 2024

Art | Basel

Éric Troncy

Jill Mulleady's paintings make sparks fly

Inspired by Giotto, Edvard Munch, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the Paris-based Argentinian artist is preparing a new two-person exhibition with Henry Taylor at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin

In collaboration with *Numéro art*

After living in Los Angeles for over ten years, Jill Mulleady has relocated to Paris, where she is currently working on her upcoming exhibition in February at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin. The 43-year-old artist has quietly established herself as an erudite and sophisticated painter. While many contemporary painters confine themselves to a precise genre – landscape for **Shara Hughes** or portraits for Genesis Tramaine and **Nathaniel Mary Quinn** – Mulleady's paintings appears to be rooted in cinema. Her screen capture-inspired scenes are an updated version of genre painting.

'I have finally become the Parisian everyone thought I was,' the self-proclaimed 'fifth-generation Argentine' says laughingly. Born in 1980 in Montevideo to Argentine parents who had emigrated to Uruguay, she grew up in Buenos Aires, where her family eventually returned in 1983. She also has a Swiss passport, but has never lived in Switzerland. Asked to sum up her identity Mulleady explains: 'I'm a mix of North America, South America, and Europe.' At the age of 20, she came to Paris for the first time to study theater with Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil at the Cartoucherie in Bois de Vincennes, and then joined a Russian theater company in Strasbourg.

Painting, however, has always been present in her life, and not only because her great-grandfather used to teach landscape painting at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin between 1881 and 1892: 'I've always been painting, it came to me naturally. I can't pinpoint the exact moment it all began. Painting has always been with me.' Mulleady made it the focus of her education at Chelsea College of Arts in London, then moved to LA in 2013, where she lived until June 2023, before flying off again...to Paris.



Jill Mulleady. Courtesy of the artist.

With good cause, she believes in destiny. She found her Parisian art studio online from the United States, and as she settled down in the French capital, she realized that it was in fact the birthplace and childhood home of Joris-Karl Huysmans, the Symbolist art critic and author of the infamous novel *À rebours* (1884), whose main character, Jean des Esseintes, is an eccentric antihero with very distinct artistic tastes and no time for conformism or any kind of categorization.

As in literature and film, Mulleady's figurative paintings are led, above all, by their narrative possibilities. Indeed she notes, 'When I conceive of a painting, I often picture it as cinematic material.' Each work unveils imaginary worlds and tells a story combining elements from autobiographical sources, evocations of historical paintings, pop culture images, fantastic creatures, and monsters inspired by all kinds of mythologies. All in a chaotic abundance of details.



Jill Mulleady, A Thousand Natural Shocks, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

Borrowing from the literary genre of the *Nouveau Roman*, Mulleady adopts an 'open narrative' which allows room for the audience's own interpretation, without favoring any particular viewpoint, and welcoming accidents. For instance, the half-transparent female figure wearing a top hat in *A Thousand Natural Shocks* (2017) holds a pill in each hand – a blue one in the left, and a red one in the right. Many have understood it as a veiled reference to the blue and red pills that offer either ignorance or knowledge to the characters in the film *The Matrix* (1999). Yet Mulleady saw it as a political choice between the Democrats (traditionally symbolized by the color blue) and the Republicans (symbolized by red), as she painted the canvas shortly after Donald Trump was elected. The truth is that it doesn't really matter – her painting is not supposed to convey a specific message, but rather to weave together several narrative threads at the same time. In the case of *A Thousand Natural Shocks*, the story can evolve with the female character's shadow, disassociated from the figure itself, and brandishing a revolver, or head in another direction with the three colored bottles in the foreground.

The great elegance of these paintings lies in their ability to make viewers think that they are capable of comprehending something complex, and perhaps even take pleasure in doing so. The multilayered stories Mulleady creates merge with other already existing narratives thanks to her allusions to art history. We can identify the colorful palette of **Edvard Munch's** *The Scream* (1893) in a sky; or a nod to Pieter Bruegel the Elder in a scene picturing small characters on a snowy skating rink, which is immediately offset by a vampire in the foreground, seemingly straight out of an episode of the television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In her large mural painting, she seems to have made a literal reproduction of Giotto's skies in the Scrovegni chapel in Padua, Italy. Each historic painting brings its own imaginary world, joining with Mulleady's universes within her own canvases.



Jill Mulleady, *Untitled*, 2023. Photograph by Thomas Lannes. Courtesy of the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris.

At the 2019 Venice Biennale, she presented two series of paintings – the one exhibited in the Giardini featured figures at leisure in interiors or gardens, while the other, shown in the Arsenale, portrayed scenes of police conflict within urban landscapes. Two different worlds...or perhaps the same, with elements recurring in both. Mulleady explains she was thinking of Munch's 'Frieze of Life', and its reflection on the cycle of life and death and the torments of the soul.

In her Parisian studio, Mulleady is now devoting herself to her upcoming two person exhibition with Henry Taylor at the Schinkel Pavillon next month. The new series invites us to remember that everything is but a matter of perspective. The recurring motif is the bedroom (and all the narrative elements contained therein), and it is represented from different points of view, different parts of the room, at different times, both before and after the crime – for there is a good chance that this bedroom was the scene of a murder...Mulleady thinks a little bit differently these days, as she explains: 'There's a lot of figurative painting nowadays, and I don't want to simply produce images, but rather to produce less. I believe in nature, and in the magic of life. Life's just a spark, and that spark, that miracle, is what I try to reproduce in my art.'

This article is part of an ongoing editorial collaboration with *Numéro art*. Read the original article [here](#).

Jill Mulleady is represented by **Gladstone Gallery** (New York, Brussels, Rome, Seoul) and **Fitzpatrick Gallery** (Paris).

Jill Mulleady's paintings are featured in the group exhibition 'THEY', until March 31, 2024 at Le Consortium in Dijon, France.

The exhibition 'Jill Mulleady & Henry Taylor - You Me' will be on view at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin from February 17 to May 19, 2024.

Éric Troncy is an art critic, curator, and co-director of Le Consortium, Dijon.

English translation: Emma Naroumbo Armaing for *Numéro art*.

Caption for full-bleed image: Installation view of Jill Mulleady's exhibition 'Blood Fog' (2021-2022) at the Consortium in Dijon (detail).

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