



Margo Selski Explores Myths of Her Own Making

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by Pat Rogers

Once upon a time there was a secret underwater society where girls grew, gardens flourished and Steampunk technology ruled. Nearby, on land, princesses, queens and women didn't shirk from exploring a topsy-turvy world where nothing is what it seems—including themselves. These are the worlds that artist Margo Selski plumbs. In her paintings, grand plans are halted and introspect captured in portraits depicting characters in imaginary lands where legends live.



"Memory III" by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.



"The Three Tatis" by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 60 x 40 inches.

For her paintings, Selski plucks people mid-story from tales of her own making. They are each portrayed in detailed compositions that combines art references and Selski's personal experiences through influences including Renaissance painting, Greek writings, Flemish masters, Surrealism and Magical Realism to create an unusual type of portraiture—especially since none of the subjects actually exist or are part of any known story.

To tackle a world where William Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll make complimentary bedfellows, Selski infuses playful images and balanced compositions to provide a sense of ease for viewers. Only upon close examination do the rich compositions reveal heroines with hearts that aren't pure, convictions that aren't steady or dark twists to the expected. These discoveries move the paintings beyond beautifully-costumed characters from an implied historic period (with unexpected appendages) into a rich inner world filled with secrets, memories and decisions waiting to be made.



“The Last Glimpse of the Real Me” by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches.



“Invisible Light” by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches.

In culling characters and their stories from a fictitious world, Selski symbolically channels the uneasy nature of living and being human. Selski’s art addresses the complexity of motherhood, familial love, identity and the fragility of childhood and life. Her paintings explore the clash between myth and reality, control and spontaneity, permanence and impermanence, and appearances and actuality.



“Here Today” by Margo Selski. Oil and beeswax on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.

To mimic Renaissance paintings, Selski developed a unique technique involving oil paint, beeswax, aged tints and frozen paintings to cause cracks in the beeswax. With time, Selski modified the method to create fissures by scratching the beeswax with dental tools and filling the crevices with oil paint. The process is repeated several times until the desired effect is fully realized, according to Selski. The result gives the contemporary work the appearance of belonging to history.



“Young Lady with a Teacup Piglet and Attention” by Margo Selski. Oil and beeswax on panel, 16 x 12 inches.

In pairing the classical and the contemporary, Selski presents the idea that her art cannot fit in a single classification with one identity—just like people.

“As wearying as the balancing act can be, I realize that I would not be content with my art being entirely one thing or another,” Selski writes in her artist statement. “I would never want to paint

straightforward portraits. I would never want to paint abstract paintings. And further, I realize that I would not be content with myself being only one thing or another. I guess that I am truly most comfortable balanced between the extremes. Somewhere in the middle, somewhere that is neither East nor West nor North nor South, not here nor there, not then or now, is me.”



“Ladies Underwater Gardening Society Rule No. 5” by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.



“Ladies Underwater Gardening Society Night Drilling” by Margo Selski. Oil on canvas, 60 x 40 inches. (Sold)

BASIC FACTS: Paintings by Margo Selski are exhibited at Richard J. Demato Fine Arts Gallery, 90 Main Street, Sag Harbor, NY 11963. www.rjdgallery.com

Margo Selski’s solo shows include galleries in California, Minnesota, Illinois, New York, South Dakota and Kentucky. Her work is collected by museums including the Plains Art Museum (North Fargo, ND), Tweed Museum of Art (Duluth, ND), Frederick R. Weisman Museum at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN) and others. Her work has been exhibited in group museum shows including the Walker Art Museum (Minneapolis, MN), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA), the North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks, ND) and others.

Selski’s studio is located in Washington. The current exhibition at the Richard J. Demato Fine Arts Gallery in Sag Harbor marks the first time Selski is showing in the Hamptons, NY.

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