

TALKING WITH: Reisha Perlmutter on the Body, Femininity & Connections through Water

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by Pat Rogers

Reisha Perlmutter's subjects in her paintings inhabit a watery world. Nude female bodies stretch, cavort and emerge from the sun dappled water of pools, ocean and bays. While easy to enjoy, it can be more difficult to see that the paintings don't depict nubile bodies for sexuality's sake but capture personal moments of freedom when self-awareness is discovered and reconciled with the constraints of biology. The role femininity can play is infused into the work. So is the realization that bodies change and transitions can spark a search for identity and self-acceptance whose intensity belies the beauty bestowed in Perlmutter's paintings.

The roles biology—and the physical—can play in identity is a long-standing interest of Perlmutter's and inspires her art, she said recently. Her paintings took a turn toward the water after she sustained an injury that required recuperation and physical therapy. For the Florida native, it was natural to take to the pool for relief and comfort. It was during this time she realized how floating in water freed her from physical pain and provided a unique setting for self-reflection where nakedness gave way to clarity. This led her to offer the same experiences to other women who are first photographed by Perlmutter, with paintings made from image composites.

On the occasion of the artist's first solo show in the Hamptons, "[Reisha Perlmutter: Immerse](#)" at [Roman Fine Art](#) in East Hampton, NY, [Pat Rogers](#) of [Hamptons Art Hub](#) corresponded and then conversed with Reisha Perlmutter about her painting, femininity, identity and how painting captures the process of personal discovery.

Pat Rogers: What inspires your art?

Reisha Perlmutter: My work is about how we relate to our bodies and the natural world in which they exist. Organic imagery and abstract memories from my childhood, growing up with the ocean, deeply color my work. Water and light move through these images, blurring the separation between body and nature. This ambiguity allows for a deep connection to our senses, and an awareness of our bodies beyond superficiality.

I am profoundly drawn to the organic nature of oil paint; the way it bleeds, glows, moves, and exists. It's an incredible medium to describe such instinctive imagery. I am equally drawn to its imperfections, and its simultaneous ability to exist as both a painted gesture or mark, as well as a

palpable experience or memory.



“Hydrangea” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2017. Oil on canvas, 82 x 66 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

I specifically have chosen to work with feminine imagery in order to speak directly to the relationship women have with our bodies, and how we choose to define ideals of femininity. Water holds us entirely in peace and allows us to return to an intimacy with our bodies. By avoiding the inclusion of cultural signifiers and clothing, the primal relationship between body and nature surfaces. Understanding our bodies and our femininity becomes a story of our own; an intimate quest to connect with ourselves.



“Disperse” by Reisha Perlmutter. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy Damien Roman Gallery.

PR: How did the Series Begin?

RP: Moving through different periods of work is a natural phenomenon, where the beginnings and ends of series are ambiguous, sort of like life. I initially began painting my water series when I was in Florida, and I was focusing on organic imagery of women connected to their natural environment. These women were nude, without makeup, and in my eyes, returning to a fundamental sense of existence, where the biology of their bodies and their cells were connected to everything around them.

At that time, I was focusing on light and light patterns on the body as a means of abstraction between body and environment. I had the idea of incorporating water into these environments mostly because it was right in front of me, and throughout my life, I have been very connected and influenced by water as a vehicle for connection. It felt like an intuitive way to talk about feeling, sensation and body with paint, and something that had colored childhood growing up in Florida.

The challenge of painting fleeting light patterns moving across the body, and abstracting the body and environment was something that I was very excited about. Water became the perfect way for me to describe ideas and feelings that I had struggled to find the right visual vocabulary previously.



"Fission" by Reisha Perlmutter. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy Damien Roman Gallery.



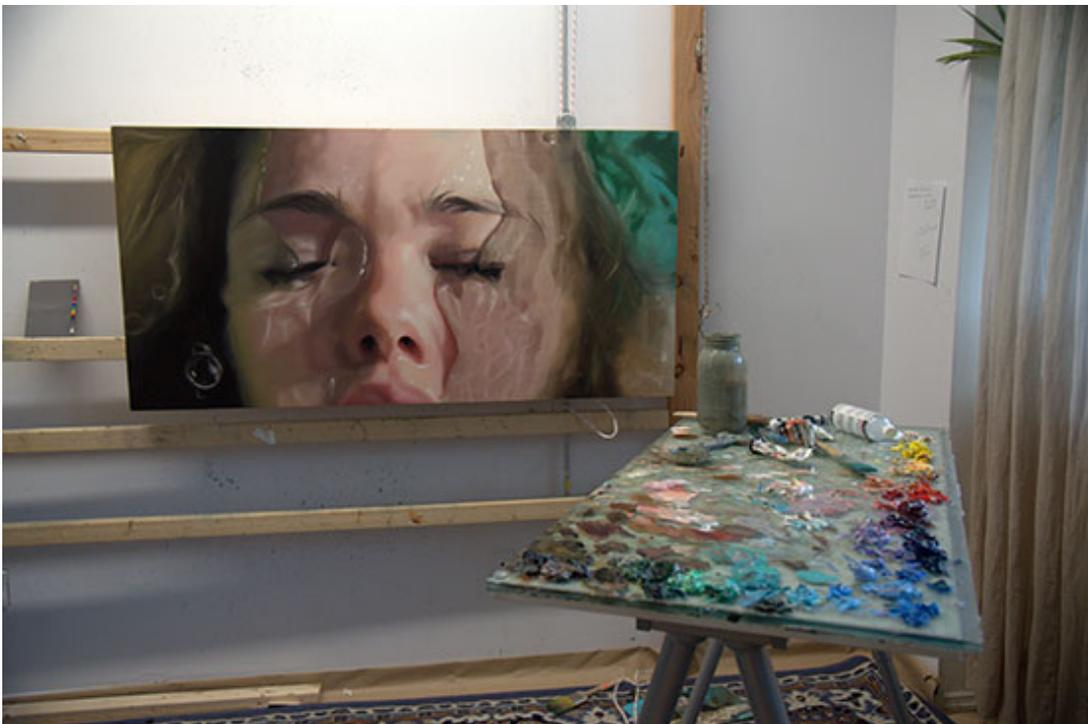
“Splay” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2016. oil on canvas, 36 x 54 inches. Photo by Alexandra Fanning.

PR: Why hyperrealism?

RM: Although my work is generally grouped into hyperrealism, I don't consider myself a hyperrealist. I find that because my work is often first presented on social media platforms the small format, the gestural abstraction, energetic quality, and feeling of the paint is generally lost. Although my work definitely resides in the realm of realism, the role of gestural abstraction and physicality of the paint is really important to me. I have never been interested in tightly rendering an image with a tiny brush to create the illusion of a photograph. My love for painting comes from the quality of paint, and the inherent abstraction of brushwork that has the ability to create an image that feels real.



"Dione" by Reisha Perlmutter. Oil on canvas. Courtesy Damien Roman Gallery.



"Whirl" by Reisha Perlmutter, 2017. Oil on wood panel, 30 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: Why is femininity important?

RM: Since I can remember, I have always been interested in the way that I, as a female, relate, understand and operate in my physical body. Sickness, injury, and imperfections as a part of life, are elements that I believe are integral to the idea of understanding the resilience and beauty of the body as a whole.

In my work, I am less concerned with the idea of “femininity” and more interested in what it means for women to move into a place of empowerment as it relates to our relationship with our biology and our bodies. I am deeply interested in re-contextualizing beauty as it relates to the body. Scars, sickness, body type and physical expression make up our bodies. They are resilient, intelligent and the beauty of each individual’s DNA is uniquely poetic. In this, I find beauty.



“Phoenix” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2017. Oil on canvas, 44 x 65 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: What is the link between feminine ideals, the body and how they relate to personal identity? Why is it important?

RM: The perception of feminine ideals and how they relate to the body is more or less the conceptual cornerstone of my work. I think it is the breaking down of feminine ideals that allows for women to develop a deeper relationship with their bodies. My work is a reflection of the my views, my struggles, and my experiences, as is the case for most artists. I have personally been conflicted by the pressures of feminine idealism as it relates to body image. Through injuries and sickness, I have vacillated between divorcing myself from my body, and trying to cultivate a relationship with

it again.

I think this is important because many women are similarly conflicted. I want my work to be a platform beyond judgment, where women are invited to think about the relationship they have with their bodies. I want my imagery to convey ultimate connected-ness, without an emphasis on idealism and body parts, and instead the body is perceived as the intelligent, biological, whole, beautiful thing that it is.



“Aditi” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2017. Oil on canvas, 38 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: Why a woman’s point of view only?

RP: There is an authenticity in making work from what I personally experience, and feel deeply. For me, physicality as it relates to femininity is an intimately personal relationship.



“ANISE” by Reisha Perlmutter. Oil on canvas. Courtesy Damien Roman Gallery.

PR: In your work, it seems as if you’re working with self-portraits and maybe another model or two. Can you clarify?

RP: I have been painting self-portraits for years. For me, self-portraiture is a powerful way of breaking down my identity into pure biology, which is something that fascinates and energizes me. In the process of painting myself, I lose attachment to how my nose should look, and instead I am focused on the planes and the muscles from my cheek that move into my nose that make me, me. There is no prioritization of form, and I continue to realize that I am made up of all the cells of my body interacting because of my DNA. Painting myself, especially from life, allows me to reconnect.

I have been working with quite a few “models” since beginning my water series two years ago. Over the past few months, I have worked with around 15 women, none of whom are “models” in the literal sense. Instead, all of these women, who come from all different backgrounds and were asked to participate by “letting go.” By that I mean being able to just be, without makeup, clothing or jewelry; to be completed naked.



“Luna” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2017. Oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches. Photo by Alexandra Fanning.

PR: How did this body of work impact you as an artist?

RP: I think this work really allowed me to find a language I had been searching for in previous series. This language is about the simultaneous necessity to have aspects of abstraction and realism in my work, and making them feel cohesive. Thematically, abstracting the body while maintaining physical and “real” feeling is something that I have been fixated by for many years. Abstracting the body into its environment allows viewers as humans to engage with the body beyond the psychological confines that come as a result of compartmentalized body parts.

PR: Do you have a favorite piece?

RM: Each piece feels so different to me, and reflects a different moment in my life. Regardless of whether the piece is a self-portrait, or a painting of someone else, I am always drawn back to the unique moment when the image was initially captured. This makes each painting different and intimate for me in its own way.



Reisha Perlmutter with "Swear." Courtesy of the artist.

Reisha Perlmutter grew up in Naples, Florida and is currently based in New York. She received her BA in Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, where she was mentored by [Susanna Coffey](#), who influenced her work. Additionally, she studied painting in Umbria, Italy, attended classical French atelier painting and drawing courses at Studio Escalier (Paris, Loire Valley). She earned an MFA in figurative painting and anatomy from the New York Academy of Art in New York. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Miami, Munich, Southampton and East Hampton, NY, Naples, FL and Westport, MA. One of her newest paintings will be featured as part of the [Naples International Film Festival](#) in October 2017.

In 2016, her art was selected for the exhibition "Water|Bodies" at the Southampton Arts Center in Southampton, NY. Her painting, *Receive*, was featured on the catalogue cover for the group show curated by artist Eric Fischl and David Kratz, president of the New York Academy of Art.

In a [review for Hamptons Art Hub](#), James Croak wrote "*Reisha Perlmutter's "Aqua" series of delightful underwater nudes seem to have been painted with an effortless facility that belies her young age. Showing her work Receive in the show and also using it on the cover of the catalog seems entirely appropriate, but it is still quite a milestone for an artist in her mid-20s. Her work is vaguely photorealism but doesn't suffer from the stiffness so often associated with 'projected imagery.'*"

BASIC FACTS: "[Reisha Perlmutter: Immerse](#)" is on view July 28 to August 27, 2017 at Roman Fine Art, 66 Park Place East Hampton, NY 11937. www.romanfineart.com. To see more of Reisha

Perlmutter's art, visit www.reishaperlmutter.com. See the latest on her Instagram account by clicking [here](#).

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