

Art in America

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JOCELYN HOBBIE

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"Entre Nous" is Jocelyn Hobbie's first solo exhibition in New York in four years; preceding and overlapping Halloween, it's an appropriate prelude to traditions, high art and folk, of the grotesque. The artist's hyper-realistic, lushly-executed style and lurid subject matter invoke various eras and influences including but not limited to: the hectic gaiety of Weimar Germany; the sleazy realism of illustrations for pulp fiction novels of the 1950's; and Hollywood's Golden Age when leading ladies including Lana Turner, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford dominated the silver screen. The syntheses of these motifs offer a look at the vulgarity she persists in depicting the female form.

These images, exclusively featuring women, address tropes of mortality and eroticism. In *Arcadia* (2010), two ethereal nymphs reclining in sexually suggestive positions; the crone-like figure in *Mother and Daughter* (2010) grasps the thread of life in her claw-like hands. There is something flat, inhuman and unsettling about the bodies Hobbie depicts, and in the archetypal roles they assume. In *Pilgrim* (2010), a doll-like figure stands alone in a fairy-tale forest of blazing red and gold foliage punctuated by virginal white birches. The woman's hands rest on her hips, wearing a fur hat and medieval gown. The rendering of nature is so overtly symbolic as to distort its legibility.

In *Arcadia* (2010), two young women recline on a geometrically-patterned blanket. The glamorous blond is a Lana Turner look-alike; she wears an azure blouse with a scattering of overblown flowers, accented by the glitter of eye-catching bright metal rivets. The fur decorating her blouse contrasts sharply with the other woman's traditionally masculine striped shirt. Particularly provocative are the contradictory symbols in this painting: a skeletal fish on a plate near the head of the blond woman suggests appetites satisfied, but a box of unlit matches implies a fire not yet struck. Their arms are entwined with similar decoration, a visual, artistic pun that demonstrates their erotics. Nonetheless, the eyes of the two young women stare out from the canvas looking beyond one another, setting up an obviously outdated morality tale.

Perhaps the most remarkable and mysterious painting in this exhibit is *Mother and Daughter* (2010), in which the older figure might be an evil stepmother, or a wicked witch in a Grimm's fairy tale. Whatever loveliness she may have had is long past: Her mascara and rouge has been over-applied; her lipstick seems pasted on. Between her fingers she grips a slender piece of silver twine. Vacant eyes, ribbon-like bluish hair, and frozen pose hark back to old mythologies in which the Fates (old crones) allot the future to helpless human beings. Powerful women are not heroic afforded the heroism of their male counterparts.