



*Sculptress*, 2023. Oil on linen, 228.6 x 284.5 cm. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

## DANIELLE ORCHARD

### YOU ARE A SERPENT WHO'LL RETURN TO THE OCEAN

April 26 - June 10, 2023

**Perrotin is pleased to present *You Are a Serpent Who'll Return to the Ocean*, Danielle Orchard's first solo exhibition at Perrotin New York.**

Danielle Orchard revisits the history of painting to find new possibilities for female representation and embodiment. Her cheeky formalism plays with the grammar and iconography of modern art to create smart, arresting, and often funny images that capture the realities of contemporary womanhood. Though Orchard's laundresses, odalisques, and bathers are rendered with the sharp and sensuous lines of cubist facture, in their details, they shed the rigidity and sexism of painterly tradition. Freed from the strictures of the male gaze, liberated from misogynist fantasy, these stock characters of art history become self-possessed and self-aware, drolly unsettling the preconceptions of the viewer. Orchard's washerwomen scrub thongs, not shirtsleeves; their bathtubs are spaces reserved as much for preening as for catching up on some light reading. When they recline, it is at their own pleasure, sprawled out beside slices of pepperoni pizza and bowls overflowing with junk food.

For her first exhibition at Perrotin New York, Orchard continues to expand the borders of female representation but does so with a new sense of personal urgency. As Orchard explains, she began theorizing the exhibition around the same time that she made the decision to have a child. Early stages of planning and painting coincided with the conception of her pregnancy, while later ones overlapped with that pregnancy's

premature end. The exhibition's title, *You Are a Serpent Who'll Return to the Ocean*, is adapted from a highly enigmatic phrase from an encounter at the hospital shared with Orchard moments before her miscarriage. Bookended by intimate physical transformation, the works on view ricochet between optimism, grief, and absurdism, conveying the hopefulness of pregnancy, the devastation of miscarriage, and the sense of humor required to cope with this form of loss—one that is rarely shown in popular media despite its prevalence.

Full of rounded breasts and swollen bellies, Orchard's new paintings revel in the nude pregnant form, paying homage to work by artists like Paula Modersohn-Becker. At the same time, they comment on the fragility of pregnancy through tongue-in-cheek allusions to infertility in the form of wilting flora, contorted fruits, and broken or fried eggs. Inspired by Andrew Wyeth's ethereal *Day Dream* (1980), *Our Sympathies (After Wyeth)* (2023) was originally intended to capture a scene of luxuriant rest. The present version, instead depicts a moment of anxious recuperation. A woman spread out on a daybed clutches a lightly distended stomach, her eyes hollowed with fatigue. Her caretaker, dressed in mourning attire, lingers in the doorway having just delivered a convalescent meal of sardonic symbolism, comprising one overcooked ovum and one warped peach, its fleshy curves dulled and flattened.

A similar reversal of dream and nightmare occurs in *Le Cauchemar* (2023), a moody reimagining of Picasso's *Le Rêve* (1932). Unlike the placid dreamer in the original, Orchard's subject sits wide awake into the



*Pêches Plates*, 2022. Oil on linen. 228.6 x 142.2 cm. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



*A Fallow Field*, 2023. Oil on linen. 228.6 x 142.2 cm. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

early morning hours, a hazy sun illuminating her exposed torso. In her lap, she cradles a bird's nest that has been attacked by a hostile predator, a wriggling green snake emerging from its lonesome egg in place of a baby bird. On a nearby side table, sperm cells swim inside a crystalline bouquet of grapes. Like many in the exhibition, the image speaks to both the beauty and abjection of nature—its capacity to delight and disgust our expectations. The potted plants lining the windows in *Sculptress* (2023) appear to simultaneously be waxing and waning. Are they in the midst of growing or rotting away? One might ask a similar question of sleeping women in *A Fallow Field* (2023) and *Pêches Plates* (2022). Do the bloated shadows encircling their naked bodies foreshadow future pregnancy or record sites of pregnancies now past? In their malleable and multiple meanings, Orchard's work makes overt the contradictions that lie at the heart of Western maternal iconography. Modersohn-Becker died of unexpected postpartum complications, a victim of the very fecundity whose contours she so boldly and beautifully committed to

canvas. The Virgin Mary, the gold standard of maternity, gave birth amid premonitions of sacrifice—the nativity but a prequel to the main event of the pieta.

As wonderful as pregnancy is, it can also be a “sham” and a “con.” This is the message of the shampoo and conditioner on the edge of the tub in *Red Bath* (2023), showing a bathroom aglow in low red lighting reminiscent of a darkroom. Abbreviated with Braque-like precision, the bottle labels use Orchard's characteristic penchant for visual puns and wordplay to process female corporeality in all its complexity.

—Hannah Stamler

**[More information about the artist >>>](#)**