

Jessie Homer French

In Memoriam

06.02.2025
10.03.2025

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *In Memoriam*, the first exhibition by American artist Jessie Homer French in Hong Kong. Featuring a series of works created over the past year, *In Memoriam* invites us to notice the overlooked corners of our world, to embrace its contradictions, and to discover the quiet magic lying beneath the surface of time.

Born in New York but spiritually rooted in the wide-open, untamed landscapes of the American West, Homer French's practice is inextricable from her surroundings. Decades ago, she relocated with her husband to the high desert of inland California, a remote expanse whose stillness and severity seeped into her work. Here, against the backdrop of towering pines and the vastness of open skies, she built a visual language grounded in reverence for the land.

Homer French's style balances folkish simplicity with evocative complexity. Her influences are as eclectic as her subjects. She cites a fondness for medieval art, particularly Giotto's frescoes, with their vibrant colors and disregard for perspective. Early American folk art also informs her work, evident in her preference for flattened planes and bold, narrative-driven compositions. Yet, her style remains distinctly her own, shaped by decades of observation and practice.

Fire emerges as a recurring protagonist in Homer French's oeuvre. Since the 1980s, the artist has returned time and again to the image of wildfires. These aren't just records of natural phenomena; they are meditations on destruction and renewal, chaos and beauty. "I've been in a house fire. I've been in forest fires. Fires are beautiful - terrifying, but beautiful," she reflects. Her flames are rendered in colors that surprise and disarm: dark oranges and yellows, shifting with the dryness of what's burning and the eerie glow of nighttime. These paintings crackle with an energy that is as entrancing as it is unsettling, their hypnotic radiance tempered by the sense of fragility they leave behind.

Not all of Homer French's landscapes are ablaze, though. In *Above the Clouds* and *God's Café*, she

shifts her focus to quieter scenes, revisiting dusky deserts and secluded moments stored away in memory. *Above the Clouds* is a homage to her mountain home, portraying a bird's-eye view of the peaks she once called her own. Their hazy outlines rise dreamlike from the sky, but this is no sentimental farewell. Instead, the work reflects French's understated acknowledgment that landscapes, like memories, are always evolving. The work hovers somewhere between longing and detachment, where her vast emotions translate into deceptively simple compositions.

In *God's Café*, Homer French transforms a long-forgotten photograph of a roadside café in the desert, taken in the 1980s, into a scene that radiates humor and quiet nostalgia. "It takes me a while to get around to things sometimes," she remarks with a smile, a reflection of her thoughtful, unhurried approach to her art.

Time, too, is an ever-present undercurrent. As a child, Homer French recalls, she "proved" that time was circular—a belief that has only deepened over the years. Now, her paintings speak to a cyclical vision of existence, where moments slip away only to resurface, transformed. "Nothing lasts, which I'm old enough to know," she muses. But paradoxically, her works preserve precisely what they acknowledge as fleeting: fragments of memory, the contours of a season, a glimmer of light.

In Memoriam is an exploration of presence and absence, memory and forgetting. While its title hints at remembrance, the exhibition reaches beyond nostalgia. It urges us to consider the unseen forces that shape our lives—those that endure even as they slip from view.

"I think the world might last till the end of the century," she quips. "We're the only animals who can remember the past and imagine the future. And we're the only animals who draw. So maybe we'll figure it out and survive for a while." Tender yet unsparing, her work creates a space for reflection—on the past, the present, and the possibilities of what might still come—if we can learn to look beyond the surface, as she does.

Jessie Homer French

Jessie Homer French was born in New York in 1940. She currently lives and works in Oak View, California.

A self-taught artist, her paintings emerge from a continuous analysis of places surrounding her and reveal the artist's personal and profound attitude to a local and transient type of composition. Through a simplified language - only apparently naive, flat colours and calm brushstrokes - Homer French treats with delicate care existential issues related to death, nature and rural life. In her work, humanity appears a toxic intruder in a melancholic nature, and yet, even the paintings with the darkest subjects feature a formal vitality capable of giving extraordinary immediacy to her bittersweet and anti-pastoral compositions, in which creation and destruction coexist with exemplary candour.

Homer French's work is included in the collections of the Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.