



Danielle Orchard, *Presentation*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 66 x 86 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salveson.

DANIELLE ORCHARD

FIRSTBORN

September 12 – October 18, 2025

Perrotin is pleased to present Danielle Orchard's first solo exhibition with the gallery in Los Angeles. In her latest exhibition, *Firstborn*, the American artist traces the transformative and fragile terrain of early parenthood, where moments of quiet vigilance, sudden intensity, and tender care unfold alongside the rhythms of daily life. Her new paintings capture intimate encounters and, drawing on art historical references, examine the interplay between the physical and the symbolic.

In *Firstborn*, Danielle Orchard's lush, velvety paintings revel in the primal chaos of early motherhood—from gestation to childbirth and childrearing—offering deeply symbolic compositions that mine the spiritual, psychological, and corporeal complexities inherent to the nurturance of life. As discrete acts of material creation, painting and mothering here go hand in hand: each function as an embodied experience that necessitates a well of stamina and intuition, invariably redrawing the somatic boundaries of the practitioner.

While predominantly about maternity, Orchard's works also incorporate art historical references as their encoded subject matter, buttressed in their effectiveness by her sophisticated palette. In *Presentation* (all works 2025), one of the largest new paintings in the exhibition, a supine woman rests on a verdant cloth, her body played across a well-lit stage as an object of public examination—a nod to historical depictions of the reclining female figure. Recalling the cubist forms of Picasso, the romanticized nudes of Rousseau, as well as 18th century paintings of surgical amphitheaters, the

figure here is a pregnant nude undergoing a caesarian section—a procedure rarely, if ever, represented in painting—which Orchard renders as if from a dream. Mountains, a palm tree, and a body of water background the mother, emphasizing her organicity and imbuing the composition with surrealist undertones. The baby, upright and mobile, pulls the umbilical cord from his mother's seemingly sleeping body, leaving a trail of bloody footprints in his wake. Here, Orchard manages to depict a dramatic, graphic scene with poetic softness, underscoring the unpredictable and labyrinthine experience of childbirth.

Highlighting the act of mothering itself, *Hatching* depicts a communal gathering of young motherly figures, a casual scene that eschews the conventional sacred iconography of the Madonna. This large-scale, vertical painting features a bird's eye view of three women congregating around a nest of turtle eggs, from which a young hatchling emerges. One woman, clothed in a swimsuit and sprawled across a towel in the sand, gazes up at the sky (and toward the viewer), perhaps serving as a sentinel, while the others intently observe the eggs, their faces obscured. Atop the first woman's pregnant belly is a rippling, ocean-blue portal, positing her womb—and the painting itself—as a tether between worlds, much like the taut umbilical cord in *Presentation*. Together, as enclosed organic vessels incubating life, the womb and the eggs (a recurring symbol in 17th century Dutch Vanitas paintings) function as timeless emblems of fertility, creation, and the ephemerality of existence. Ultimately, *Hatching* is a complex composition that points to pregnancy as a surreal, suspended state of waiting (a conceit



Danielle Orchard, *Hatching*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 90 x 56 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salvesson.

replicated in *The Wait*), and motherhood as a perpetual state of vigilance and expectation. Here, the mother looks inward and outward simultaneously, all the while anticipating the next stage of growth and transformation. While in *Presentation* and *Hatching* the maternal figures appear to be blissfully serene, the bleary-eyed mother depicted in *Monitor* vigilantly watches her sleeping infant, ostensibly monitoring her child's breathing. This scene, universal among new parents, hints at the visceral fears and anxieties inherent to the grueling work of a nurturing baby.

A *First Cut* similarly nods to the labor of parenting, reimagining a quotidian moment of caretaking as a bucolic, symbol-laden scene. An explicit reference to the biblical myth of Samson and Delilah (and its many art historical retellings), the painting depicts a kneeling woman, almost fully unclothed, on the verge of cutting her toddler's hair for the first time, a pivotal moment for mother and child alike. The pair stand on the edge of a sandy shore, which is lined with sinuous trees on one side and lapping water on the other. The curve of the shoreline mirrors the sliver of moon in the sky above, where an aureate sun also appears. The presence of these two opposing celestial bodies signifies twilight—the liminal, allegorical threshold between night and day, illumination and darkness, consciousness and the subconscious. Between the woman's legs, which rest on a beach towel, appear two alabaster eggs and a bowl of ripe strawberries overflowing with sanguineous fluid. Three misplaced berries rest on the ground nearby. Echoing the symbolism in *Hatching*, the eggs and the fruit together haptically index fertility and childbirth, with the dripping bowl recalling the bloody effects of both menstruation and afterbirth (the placenta and its membranes), and the fallen berries directly mirroring the blood-stained footprints in *Presentation*. As an amalgamation of symbols, everything here teeters on the precipice of transition.



Danielle Orchard, *Ophelia*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 90 x 56 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photographer: Paul Salvesson.

The large-scale *Ophelia*, an equally complex allegorical painting, likewise represents a banal familial scene, featuring a mother, a child, and a dog in a warm domestic interior. The mother occupies the center of the composition, with the rendering of her body directly alluding to Picasso's muscular nudes. In another gestural nod to Picasso (this time a specific reference to *Boy Leading a Horse*, 1905-6), an invisible thread—reminiscent of the umbilical cord—appears to connect the outstretched hand of the mother to the grasping hand of the child. Layering footnotes further still, in the background, a painting within the painting depicts a weeping, languorous willow tree, a potent symbol of the psychological pliability and tragic demise of the titular Shakespearean character. A canonical paragon of female vulnerability, *Ophelia* and her accompanying willow tree represent diametric states of becoming and undoing—corporeal and psychic dualities intimately familiar to anyone who has birthed and cared for a child.

In her series depicting swimmers (*Breast Stroke* and *Back Stroke*), a play on the leisurely bathers that pepper 19th century European painting, Orchard further plumbs these dialectical metaphors. The only works in *Firstborn* that depict women independent from children, these paintings feature close-up compositions of swimmers who gaze directly at the viewer. They actively swim rather than passively soak, representing a return to a primal, amniotic state guided solely by the movement of the soma—their own proprioceptive desires—rather than by the needs and whims of the child. With these metaphorical baptismal scenes, Orchard posits painting and swimming as equally somatic forms of choreography, with the stroke of body serving as a surrogate for the stroke of the brush.

— Jessica Simmons-Reid