

Margot Bergman
On the other hand

Anton Kern Gallery is pleased to announce Margot Bergman's fifth solo exhibition in New York. *On the other hand* reunites a group of paintings created between 2012-2014, never before seen in New York, to accompany and contextualize a selection of large-scale portraits created between 2015 – 2019.

From the mid–1990s through the late aughts, paintings by unknown artists, purchased from Chicago thrift shops, served as starting points for Bergman's uncanny portraits. The artist would instinctively paint into the existing landscapes and still lifes, to reveal faces. Interventions would range from contouring a head from a clearing in the woods, or an arrangement of flowers, to tweaking elements such as barns or vases, forming them into eyes and red lips.

As working from the thrift store paintings honed Bergman's ability to see, she began to yearn for more freedom to *paint*. In 2012, Bergman put her collection of thrift store paintings aside, choosing to use blank canvases instead. The 'tabula rasa', and ability to choose whichever scale canvas she wanted, encouraged more expressionistic painthandling, unbound and unprompted by any existing marks.

Working alone in a studio in the woods, the artist indulged her rule-breaking tendencies and wicked sense of humor. She riffed, like her favorite Jazz musicians, plotting meandering lines like slurred notes, and embarking on flights of repeated patterns. Elements of the outdoors filtered in, including flowers, horizon lines, lattices, sunshine yellow, grass green, and moonlight blue. Bergman created her own unique in-between pictorial space. Shapes morph between plants, animals and figures. In *Parade*, a pair of flowers stand contrapposto as if in conversation. In *Candy Man*, a cartoon hand offers a lollipop to a smiling plant, and in *Lucky Lady*, a recurring diamond pattern turns into dice.

Over the next two years, Margot entered more surreal territory, with examples such as *Hunger*, in which a curious group of onlookers surrounds a floating pair of lips. A breakthrough comes with *Gloria*, a face built out of faces, which becomes the bridge to the large-scale portraits of imagined women that dominated her output from 2015 – 2019.

In these later works, Bergman's faces are large, loose, and emotionally raw. She adeptly shifts styles within a single composition, juxtaposing photorealistic eyes and mouths, with a scribbly green hair-do, and a thin wash of color for the complexion, creating distorted beauties reminiscent of Dadaist collage. White primed canvas peeks out under the artist's graffiti-esque marks, revealing the immediacy of the image.

Unlike the earlier works, there are no layers of paint to hide splatters or revisions. Irregularities are important; they may even be embellished! Bergman's women are frozen in a state of flux, somewhere between forming or unraveling. The latest work in the exhibition, entitled *Pupa* (2019), whose features dissolve into a faint suggestion of a floral bouquet, is a nod to this notion. Completion and perfection are antithetical to the practice. Each painting is left with loose thread, so that the soul can wander and the artist can continue.