

HYPERALLERGIC

Darkly Funny Paintings Mash Up Comix and Cubism



Installation view of Lucia Love's 'The Wrong Ways to Smile' at Kustera Projects (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Lucia Love is a talented, Brooklyn-based artist, but if you Google her name you'll probably find a different Lucia Love — a British hardcore porn star. Somehow this algorithmic coincidence seems apiece with Love's omnivorous aesthetic appetite, which ingests everything from Picasso and Matisse to underground comix and the Chicago Imagists to contemporary advertising, branding, and pop culture.

Indeed, the centerpiece of her current show at Kustera Projects in Red Hook, *The Wrong Ways to Smile*, features its share of pornographic grotesques. "Wives and Lovers" (2016) boasts a Picasso-esque reclining nude and swimmers straight out of "Les Femmes d'Alger," but also

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cartoonish creatures engaged in cannibalistic copulating, figures that seem to have stepped out of a Tim Burton movie, and more, all floating in an indeterminate green vacuum. It's the type of raucous, high-low mashup that many contemporary figurative painters seem to be making, but it's also the least resolved work in the show; it has the sprawling incoherence of a sketchbook page blown up to a six-foot-wide oil painting. It's technically sharp, but the ideas are blurry.



Lucia Love, "Wives and Lovers" (2016)

Love's strongest pieces here feature one, two, or three figures in tightly cropped, darkly comic scenes. In "Milk Fight," two milk cartons are engaged in a Tarantino-esque fight to the death on a grassy hill under a blood-red sky. A naked man huddles in a raft and stares intently at the bars of Dove soap in his hands, oblivious to the hole in his craft, in "Going Down Clean" (2016). The surrounding waters are rendered in rounded, rippling blue forms that are very pleasing to the eye and compliment the covering

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man's palpable angst. A shrieking figure holding what resembles a malfunctioning light saber is carried off by two indeterminate characters in "Bride" (2016); the backdrop shifts masterfully from green foliage to fluffy clouds to that same blood-red sky rendered in broad brushstrokes. In the show's most poignant bit of satire, "The Wrong Ways to Smile" (2015), a figure that seems to be made of candy cane offers the viewer a selection of garish smiling mouths, as if advising a presidential candidate on the proper public countenance. The backdrop in the latter work seems to be a closeup of blood cells, which turns the cartoonish scene unexpectedly grim. Each work strikes an endearing balance between black humor and melancholy.

There's a tightness to Love's smaller paintings in this show, an accounting for and reckoning with every inch of the canvas, that is especially satisfying. The nondescript backdrop of "Wives and Lovers" makes it feel unfinished, even though it's jammed with nearly a dozen sharply executed figures. Still, the adaptability and ambition of Love's skills are evident. She'll have successfully scaled-up her work by the time she surpasses her British namesake in Google search results.



Lucia Love, "The Wrong Ways to Smile" (2015) | ngs Mash Up



Lucia Love, "Going Down Clean" (2016)

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Lucia Love, "Milk Fight" (2016)



Lucia Love, "Bride" (2016)

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