



The Feminine Sublime

January 21–June 3, 2018

Large-scale paintings by five Los Angeles-based female artists redefine sublime



Yvette Gellis, *Oil, Earth, Fire and Water*, 2017. Oil, acrylic, graphite, and canvas on canvas; triptych; 83 x 51 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist

Pasadena, CA — *The Feminine Sublime*, an exhibition on view at the Pasadena Museum of California Art from January 21–June 3, 2018, formulates an alternative and more inclusive contemporary reading of the sublime. Historically, depictions of the sublime were reserved for male painters whose rationality and order were posed against nature, the imagination, or the female “other.” In this exhibition, large-scale paintings by five female artists present a counter-narrative that upends previous ideas of the sublime in painting with a unique feminist perspective. Exhibition artists and Los Angeles-based painters Merion Estes, Yvette Gellis, Virginia Katz, Constance Mallison, and Marie Thibeault reconsider traditional approaches to landscape and enlist challenging aesthetics, formal inventiveness, and provocative imagery to re-imagine relationships with rapidly changing urban and natural environments in more relevant and meaningful ways.

In the eighteenth century, male painters utilized the sublime as a forceful theme, representing nature as a pristine and overpowering presence that man’s reason could transcend. Mid-twentieth century “masters of the abstract sublime” sought to reconnect the modern viewer with feelings of dissolution and destabilization that would result in a transformative experience, joining the universal with subjectivity. Challenging entrenched hegemonies, the twentieth-century feminist movement and postmodern critical theories carved out space for an inclusive version of the sublime.

Unfulfilled by traditional or abstracted landscapes, the exhibition artists give voice to the “other.” The painters’ large-scale works create immersive experiences within which viewers contemplate contemporary readings of the sublime as well as the annihilating and terrifying effects of global climate change, industrial capitalism, nuclear catastrophe,

terrorism, consumerist environmental degradation, technology overload, and even post-apocalyptic landscapes. The artists challenge the idea of nature as an endless repository of resources to be conquered, exploited, and consumed for purely human ends. Though they articulate ideas of dystopian insecurity, fragmentation, and collapse, their works invoke transformation, transition, and the possibilities for painting to still promote the kind of skepticism instrumental for the renewal of human consciousness. The paintings question the master discourse that perpetuates oppression and open the sublime to an alternative interpretation that respects differences and stresses co-participation.

Deeply involved with disruptive formal issues and aesthetics, the artists' acts of painting involve excess materiality and female body experience. The beautiful is not banished but rather understood alongside the monstrous and the terrifying and considered as an activating force for change.

"This timely exhibition calls the viewer to consider not only the environment and humanity's impact on it, but also the gender imbalances that have existed throughout human history and how they affect our contemporary society, even as it progresses," says exhibition curator and artist Constance Mallinson. "The five artists in *The Feminine Sublime* have established themselves as important voices and proponents of eco-feminism. As California finds itself as a leader in the fight against climate change, these women will be in the forefront of articulating the role of artists in that regard."

The Feminine Sublime leaves the viewer to wrestle with unresolved conflicts: beauty versus the abject; human ingenuity and global capitalism versus over consumption; destruction versus creation; the wonders, advantages, and drawbacks of technology; and more. The artists' alternative versions of sublimity examine the present, freeing us from the limiting views of the past. They forge a new understanding of the environment, as well as the sublime, paving the way for an inclusive future free from confining categorization.

On view in the PMCA's South Gallery, *The Feminine Sublime* is organized by the Pasadena Museum of California Art, curated by Constance Mallinson, and accompanied by a brochure. The exhibition is supported by the PMCA Board of Directors, PMCA Ambassador Circle, and the California Visionary Fund. California art patrons Joseph J. Dalrymple, Alice Harris, and Jack Johnston and David Webb underwrite the exhibition. Generous grants from the Pasadena Arts & Culture Commission and the City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division as well as Pasadena Arts League provide invaluable support.



Left to Right: Merion Estes, *The Great Defrost*, 2016. Fabric collage and acyclic on fabric, 66 1/2 x 85 1/2 inches, Courtesy of CB1 Gallery; Virginia Katz, *Land - Recomposition, with Topaz, Amethyst, Amertrine and Quartz Crystals* [detail], 2017. Acrylic and semi-precious gems on panel, 16 x 20 x 4 inches

Museum Information

MISSION

The mission of the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is to present the breadth of California art and design through exhibitions that explore the cultural dynamics and influences that are unique to California.

HOURS

Open Wednesday–Sunday, 12:00–5:00pm; third Thursday of each month, 12:00–8:00pm; closed Monday, Tuesday, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day.

ADMISSION

\$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors (62+); \$5 for students & educators; free for PMCA members & children (12 & under); free the first Friday of each month (12:00–5:00pm); free the third Thursday of each month (5:00–8:00pm). Access for people with disabilities is provided.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

The Museum is located at 490 East Union Street. From the 210 Freeway, take the Lake Avenue exit. Go south and take a right on Union Street. From the 110 Freeway/Downtown Los Angeles, follow the freeway until its end, then take Arroyo Parkway and turn right at Colorado, then left at Oakland to get to Union Street. Free parking is available in the street-level garage at the Museum.

DOCENT TOURS AND GROUP RATES

The Museum offers docent tours on the second Saturday of each month (2:00pm; free with admission). Docent tours are also available Wednesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00pm, to private groups for a fee of \$75. A non-refundable deposit of \$40 is due two weeks prior to the scheduled date. Self-guided tours for K–12 students are offered for free. We regret that we are unable to accommodate docent tours for groups larger than 35 people. Before requesting a tour, please check the exhibition calendar to see which exhibitions will be available during your visit.

A discounted group rate of \$3 per person is available for groups of 20 or more (K–12 student groups are free). Please call to notify us at least one week in advance for these special admission rates. For any questions or to make reservations for a tour or group rate, call our Bookstore & Membership Manager, Aya Lehman, at 626.568.3665 x14 or email alehman@pmcaonline.org.

For more information, please call 626.568.3665 or visit pmcaonline.org.