

Babes in the Orchard

Lindsey McLean

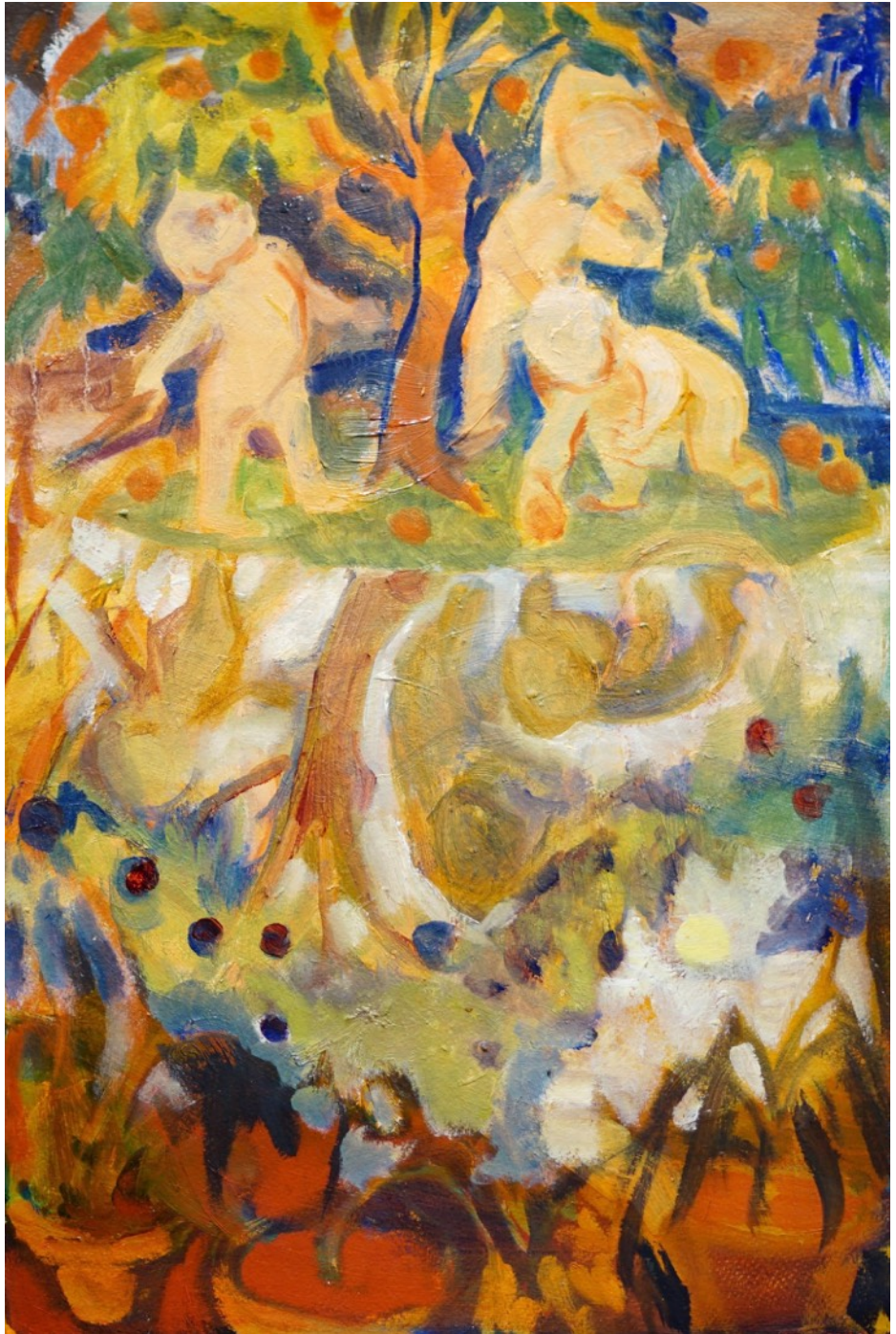
Rachel Mercer

Alyssa Hart

**Private View: Thursday 4th
October 2018, 7-10pm**

Open Fri - Sun
11am-6pm
or by appointment

Exhibition continues until 14th
October



'Babes In The Orchard' - Rachel Mercer, oil on paper

An icon is held aloft, depicting a petulant putti, chubby cheeked and proud. Alongside and behind it, a female face; somewhat weathered and bruised by experience. Her eyes are downcast, regarding a buttercup held under the chin. It's glow recalls the child's golden cheeks, yet, catching her rhubarb skin it almost seems acrid, a soured promise. A trio of pudgy cherubim beat the sweet fruit from a tree on a tiny island idyll. The still surrounding water reflects a darkly inverted reality in which the fruit turns to black through

purple and bloody crimson. Gloomy pot-plants crouch like spiders in the foreground, bringing a stronger sense of threat, of paradise lost.

Such is the strange, bittersweet world conjured by these three artists as they consider their place in a world both fertile and corrupt.

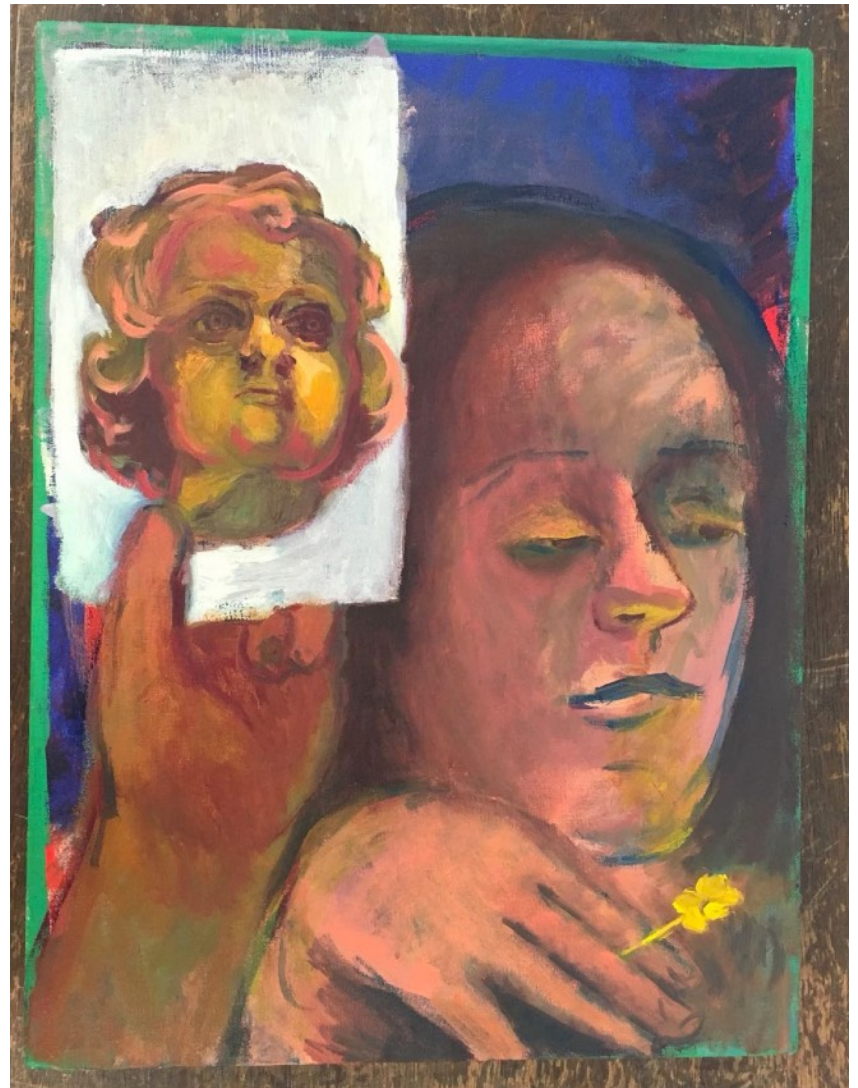
Young children recur as a motif in several of the works on show. Babies represent a state of innocence, a fresh start, hope for the future, and yet, don't they also bring to mind the most greedy, self-centred and parasitic aspects of our species?

Motherhood is framed as the most wonderful and fulfilling thing, yet spoken of as a sacrifice; the end of independence and a potential career derailer. The body prepares itself to bear fruit, whilst the head is struggling just to keep above water. No wonder children provoke such mixed feelings.

Like Esther sitting in the crotch of a fig tree in Plath's *The Bell Jar*, there seems to be on "the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future" which beckons and winks: "One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor... I saw myself sitting... starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose... as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet."

Growing up is to push through the paralysis created by an abundance of choice and an abundance of anxiety, and nowadays, most of us keep putting it off as long as we can.

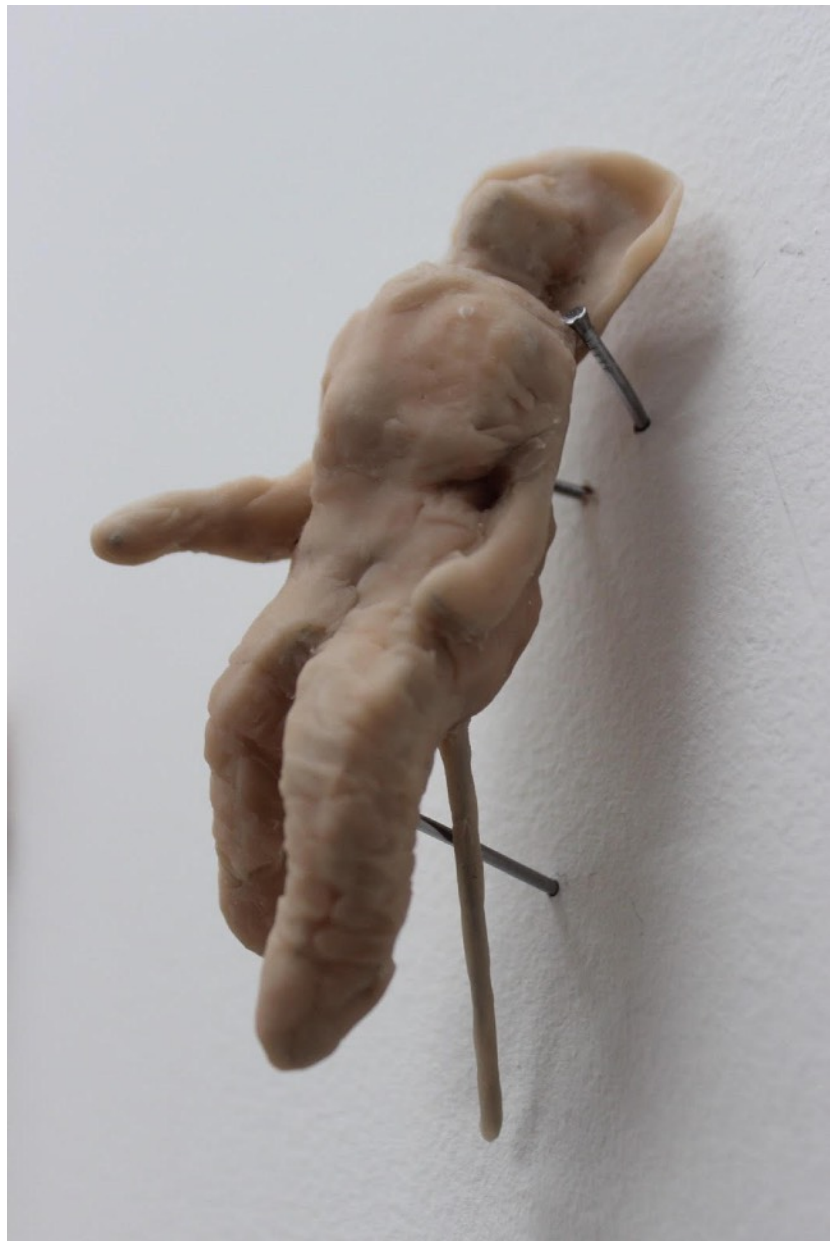
Although we seem to find these artists in such a position, their work does not strike us as anxious. In fact they seem to be revelling in the richness and silliness of simultaneous possibilities and bizarre paradoxes - isn't that the essence of good humour? They do not



pretend to give a clear answer or claim any righteous, didactic position; they allow all their feelings and ideas and half-remembered mythic fragments and anecdotes to mingle unexpectedly on the canvas. The mark-making is often loose and never over-worked, whilst the compositions are carefully structured to create a condensed pictorial space akin to medieval tapestries or frescoes.

The paintings are complemented by Alyssa Hart's small putty sculptures, which are like soft playthings almost accidentally mangled into angst-ridden and adult poses. Held by pins, they are reminiscent of the careful cruelty of a butterfly collector, or naïve torture enacted by a child upon a hapless creature.

All three artists demonstrate that art is really the most deeply serious kind of child's play.



text by Michael Chance

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