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FLAUNT

"SHOW ME YOURS" | MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY

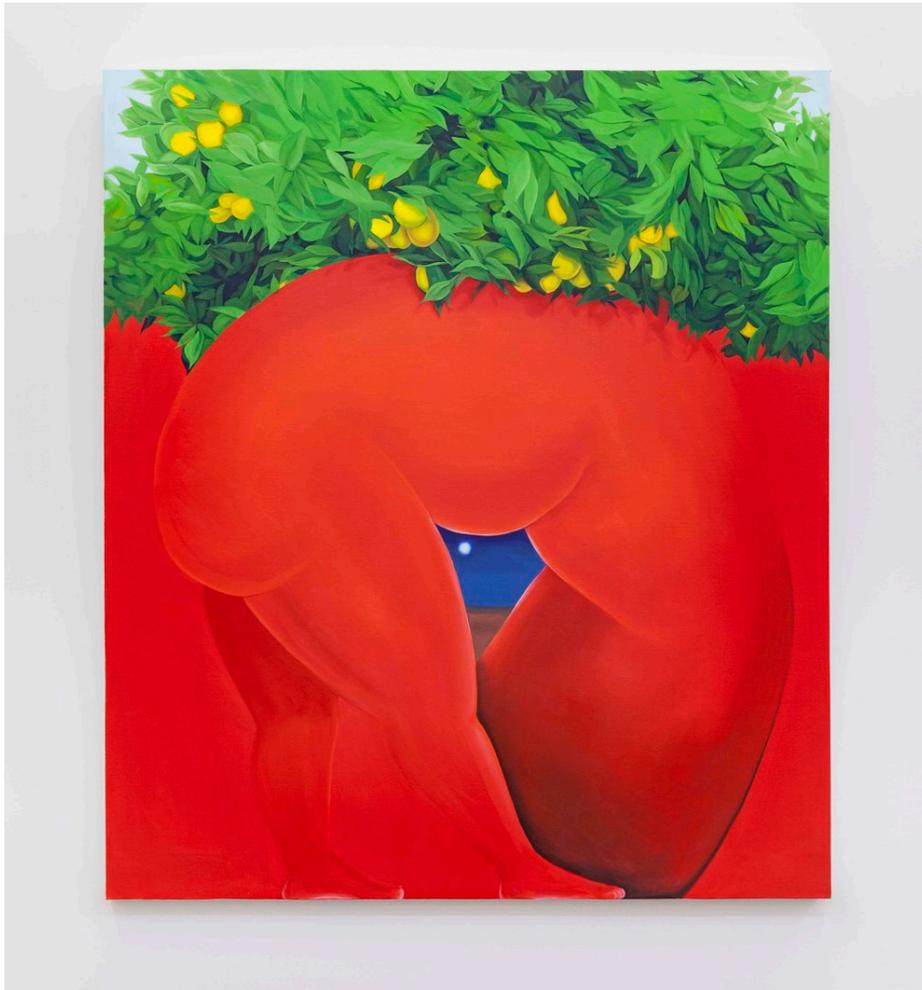
BY DONNA IBRAHIM
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Photo courtesy of [Monique Meloche Gallery](#)

"Show Me Yours" is an exhibit featuring emerging artists [Brittney Leeanne Williams](#), [Jake Troyli](#) and [Bianca Nemelc](#). This gallery in particular explores identity, trauma and gender through the nude form. The group of artists offer up their own interpretation to this classic motif by using the nudity as a site for initiating discussions about social and systematic issues.

FLAUNT got a chance to talk with the artists about how they got introduced to the art world, what nudity means to them, and what sort of discussions they hope to invoke with this exhibition.



Brittney Leeanne Williams *Lemon Tree*, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 67 x 55 in. (170.2 x 139.7 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Brittany Leeanne Williams explores the nude female body by depicting it in unique skin tone colors and contorting her subjects into circular positions where they're embracing their own bodies. These enigmatic, graceful figures are also faceless, furthering William's goal of wanting to convey symbols of hope, love, pain, and loss.

When did you begin your artistic journey?

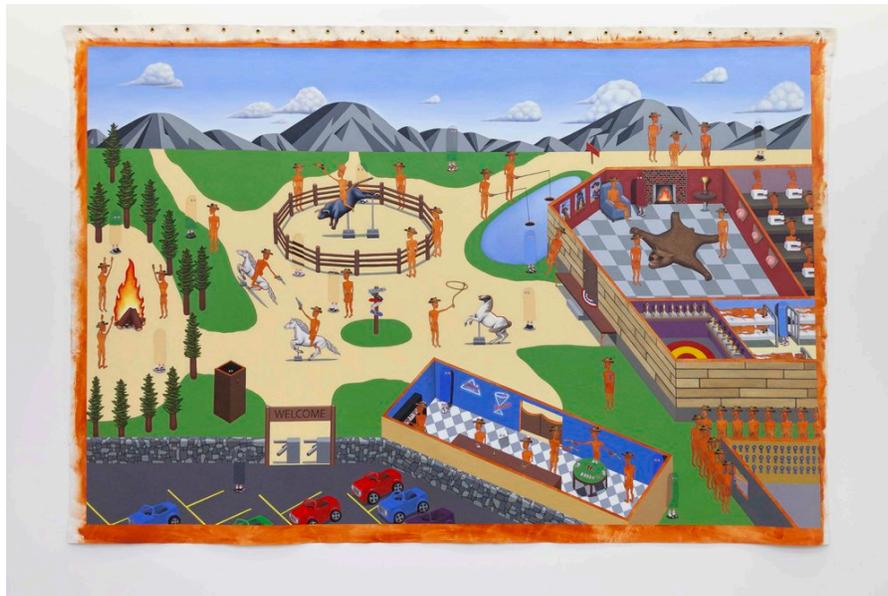
I became interested in the visual arts around 3rd grade when I was diagnosed with Dyslexia, which was a huge emotional blow. My mother, seeing how much of an emotional catastrophe the diagnosis was, diligently sought out ways for me to cope with my struggles with reading, writing, and math. So she signed me up for art classes. It ended up being a perfect fit. From there, I was obsessed. The Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California held art nights where they would shuttle members of the public to the Museum to view the collection. It was during one of those visits that I happened upon a Monet and knew I wanted to be an artist. I was captivated by Impressionism. To me, it seemed like Monet had obliterated a landscape only to then piece it back together through strokes of color. My exposure to the Museum's collection was the beginning of my art interest.

What kind of role does nudity play when expressing your art?

I view my red figures as naked more than nude. Their being undressed evokes their vulnerability and humanity, while their facelessness preserves their anonymity. The figures are both hidden and seen. While I reference Corbet's nudes, I don't view my figures as having a singular subjectivity. I'm interested in manipulating the body to produce a wide range of potentialities. I don't paint the figure in hopes of articulating just a body. The body performs many tasks in the paintings. It's a holding place or container, while also a place or landscape, and in some of my more recent work, the body takes up symbolic poses that suggest ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

This exhibition grapples with many social issues such as issues with gender, identity and trauma. And while we do live in a more progressive society, nudity, and anything of the sort, is still a pretty taboo topic. What sort of discussions do you want to invoke by using "nudity as a site for examining systematic social concerns"?

I'm interested in slowing down or complicating these discussions around social issues. I depict black women or the black female's experience, but I do it somewhat indirectly through the use of red. This is very intentional. More than grappling with social issues through nudity, I'm interested in constructing an encounter. I am trying to slow down the quick assumptions that viewers can make about rendered black skin, and instead advance what sits at the periphery of the black experience. I'm focused on the fleshiness, the humanness, the sacred bag of bones that rises to the surface of the painting through these naked red bodies.



Jake Troyli High noon at Ranchland@, 2019, oil and graphite on un-stretched cotton canvas, 84 x 126 in. (213.4 x 320 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Referencing the social practice of *code switching*, the practice of alternating different types of language based on your environment, Jake Troyli evaluates the intricacies of his identity as a bi-racial black man by showcasing humorous scenes grounded in the language of classical paintings.

When did you begin your artistic journey?

It's a complicated question, but I think the moment it clicked, the moment I thought "Oh damn, this is it. This is what I want to do for the rest of my life." was when I was in sixth grade. I was drawing and selling porn comic strips to my classmates and my teacher caught me. He called my mom and admitted to her that the drawings were "actually pretty good." That was my first real review. My mom was proud as hell.

What kind of role does nudity play when expressing your art?

I guess that depends on the specific piece, but I think no matter what, because of the medium, it can always be viewed in relationship to the history of the nude, and specifically the male nude, in the canon of painting. But like I mentioned before, there is a level of vulnerability and exposure that it brings to my figures that I find really compelling.

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Recently in my work I've been thinking a lot about performance. Performance of identity, performance of race, culture, gender, etc. So I think the nudity functions to create a strange hierarchical relationship between the figures in the paintings and the viewer. The nude black male body becomes a subject, a spectacle, at the mercy of the audience. And for me that's interesting because it makes us examine the cyclical dynamic between spectacle and spectator, and it has the capacity to defy assumptions of what masculinity is or needs to be, especially in relationship to a body of color.



Bianca Nemelc *Mujer Y el Agua #1*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 56 x 46 in. (142.2 x 116.8 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Influenced by the art in her own grandmother's home, Bianca Nemelc embraces the female body by placing it in front of an earthy backdrop of yellows and greens. Her headless female subjects aim to

stand in for all women of color through renderings of multiple shades of brown. Motivated by her own identity as a multiracial woman, Nemelc creates these immersive works on a large-scale to provide a meditative space about heritage and culture.

When did you begin your artistic journey?

My artistic journey started as an adult. I've always been creative, I use to draw charcoal sketches in my notebook, then close it up and go about my day. My grandmother's brother in Holland was a painter and I remember visiting him in his space as a young girl. I have many tucked away paintings that are in my storage from him, and my grandmother is a collector of beautiful work. So art has always been in my life but never in the spotlight until recently. I'm a self-taught painter and I didn't go to art school so for a long time there was this question of "am I good enough?" but as I came into my own, I trashed that idea and dove off the deep end. My work is very much about that idea of stripping down, being naked, being unapologetic, embracing your identity, your story, where you come from and creating a space for yourself however that looks or whatever that means.

What kind of role does nudity play when expressing your art?

In my art nudity is a way to convey both strength and vulnerability of the female body. I think that when I paint these bodies that are very close up and personal as a viewer you have no choice but to connect with them on some level. They know you are watching them, and yet they still exist in their own worlds. Nudity is a way for me to express and grapple with finding my space, taking up space and owning space as a woman of color unapologetically.

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I don't think society is as progressive as I feel like we should be in 2019. Families within our communities are being dehumanized for being Black, for being Latinx, Middle Eastern, for being the "other." I wish that was more taboo than nudity. I'm very proud to be born of a generation of change makers who are fighting to take back our stories and our heritage and our SPACE and my art taps into that conversation. I paint large scale brown women in the nude to take up space and to reclaim space. It's activism through celebration of the female form and the many shades and stories that are part of her form.

The "*Show Me Yours*" exhibit will be held at the Monique Meloche Gallery on 451 N Paulina St, Chicago, IL 60622 and will run until August 17, 2019.