



**NIKKI MALOOF**  
***NERVOUS APPETITE***

**November 21 – December 19**

Nino Mier Gallery is pleased to announce the solo exhibition “Nervous Appetite” with recent paintings and works on paper by Nikki Maloof. This is the artist’s first solo exhibition with the gallery, opening November 21<sup>st</sup> through December 19<sup>th</sup> 2020.

While Massachusetts-based Nikki Maloof has created a unique pictorial language around the depiction of domestic animals, the current exhibition of the artist’s work depicts still lifes of salmon steaks, gutted chard, dismembered crab legs, and sliced swordfish. Unlike the Dutch paintings of Pieter Aertsen, *Meat Stall*, and Joachim Buckelaer, *Fish Market*, that inspire Maloof’s “memento mori” paintings, there is not an abundance of food nor a choice in meats, rather through the singular depiction of decapitated and disemboweled fish the artist builds a pervasive feeling of discomfort and scarcity.

This sense of impending doom is counteracted by the rich, undulating patterns that abound in Maloof’s scenes. In somber greens, mauves and purples, Maloof’s patterns are found on the tile, wallpaper and textiles that define her paintings of uncanny domesticity. The gaudy and garish patterns create optical movements that are designed to instill anxiety in the viewer, and whereas Maloof’s compositions are shallow, depth is created through these complex, rolling patterns. For Maloof, “pattern” is like a third character in her paintings, and while color and subject are important to the artist, the dominant patterns attribute to the overwhelming psychological feeling of the works.

*Nervous Appetite* is a visceral investigation of the sourcing, preparation, cooking, enjoyment and *après-repas* of a grotesque, yet compelling feast. From market to table, Maloof’s scenes are both appealing and indisputably bleak. Within the multiple kitchens and table settings forming part of this series, viewers are left to wonder whether we are observing the beginning or end of the meal and whether there is a social parable or political allegory to be gleaned from the scarcity presented. Undeniable, however, is the overwhelming presence of fish.

Throughout the history of art, fish have been polysemic and Maloof navigates their many meanings, from the religious to the bourgeois, in her paintings. Maloof anthropomorphizes the dead fish with pleading eyes and slight grins on their slimy lips. While initially inspired by the formal problems of painting metallic scales, the artist was drawn to the inherent duality in painting fish, to portray them not as symbols of death but as symbols of life. In representing this inherent tragicomedy of life, Maloof creates a balance between the taboo and the familiar.

Many of Maloof’s paintings encase other paintings as the artist is particularly interested in how individual stories attribute to a comprehensive understanding of her work. In both, *Plates* and *Dinner is Served*, Maloof uses Delft ceramic plates to create a number of different stories within a single moment in time. Painted on the blue Delftware are naïve zoo scenes, a lion trapped in a cage, a grazing zebra and a double-humped camel in a small enclosure. One can’t help but feel the sense of irony that the artist is building for her fictitious dinner guests as they begin to consume other animals as part of their meal. The religious iconography present in the painting is symbolized through the trilogy of bread, fish and candles, that coupled with the unfashionable pottery produces an uncanny nostalgia. The inclination to Dutch imagery is rooted in Maloof’s maternal ancestry. While Maloof knew very little of her maternal ancestors, the disconnection created a fruitful fascination with her family’s history. To build this familial story, Maloof has created a reimagined history with visual signifiers that connect the artist to her past.