

MIER GALLERY

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat
Revise, Revise, Revise.

NIKKI MALOOF

Half
The

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While Nikki Maloof has developed a unique pictorial language around the depiction of domestic animals, most recently the artist's work has concentrated on still lifes of salmon steaks, gutted chard, dismembered crab legs, and sliced swordfish. Unlike the Dutch paintings that inspire Maloof's "memento mori" paintings, there is not an abundance of food nor a choice in meats, rather through the 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, Nikki'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 Nikki'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.

Nikki Maloof (b. 1985, Peoria, Illinois; lives and works in South Hadley, Massachusetts) will present a solo exhibition at Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles in November 2020, and has recently exhibited a solo show, After Midnight at Jack Hanley Gallery, and the group exhibitions What Did I Know of Your Days: Danielle Orchard and Nikki Maloof at V1 Gallery in Copenhagen, Denmark, 36 Paintings at Harper's Books in East Hampton, New York, Animal Kingdom at Alexander Berggruen in New York, NY Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts at The American Academy of Arts and Letters 30th, Anniversary Exhibition at Jack Hanley Gallery, Drawing Island at The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, Horror Vacui, or The Annihilation of Space at Misako and Rosen, Tokyo, A Forest on the Edge of Time at The Pit, Los Angeles, The Great Figure Two at The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, Imagine at Brand New Gallery, Milan, Let's Get Figurative at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, Tiger Tiger at Salon 94, New York, Undertonk and Friends at Undertonk, New York, Please Excuse Our Appearance at 247365, New York, and Immediate Female at Judith Charles Gallery, New York. The artist has received several awards, most recently the Helen W. Winternitz Award in Painting and Printmaking and the Gloucester Landscape Prize. Maloof received her Bachelor's degree in Fine Art from Indiana University in 2008 and Master's of Fine Art in Painting from Yale University in 2011.



SELECTED WORKS



Nikki Maloof
The Green Kitchen, 2020
Oil on canvas
60 x 84 in
152.4 x 213.4 cm
(NMA20.011)





Nikki Maloof
Chard Study, 2020
Oil on canvas
15 x 20 in
38.1 x 50.8 cm
(NMA20.016)





Nikki Maloof
The Night Kitchen, 2020
Oil on canvas
68 x 52 in
172.7 x 132.1 cm





Nikki Maloof
Still Life (for Dani), 2019
Oil on canvas
36 x 30 in
91.4 x 76.2 cm



Repeat, Repeat, Repeat
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Nikki Maloof
Fish Bones with Lemons, 2019
Oil on canvas
18 x 24 in
45.7 x 61 cm





Nikki Maloof
Little Crab, 2019
Oil on canvas
20 x 14 in
50.8 x 35.6 cm





Nikki Maloof
The Night Kitchen, 2020
Oil on canvas
68 x 52 in
172.7 x 132.1 cm





Nikki Maloof
Table Study, 2020
Graphite on paper
12 x 16 in
30.5 x 40.6 cm



Nikki Maloof
Stove Study, 2020
Graphite on paper
16 1/2 x 11 1/2 in
41.9 x 29.2 cm



INSTALLATION VIEWS



Installation View of Nikki Maloof: *Nervous Appetite* (November 21-December 19, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA



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PRESS

Forbes

December 15, 2020

Nikki Maloof's Paintings Will Sate You

By Brienne Walsh



Nikki Maloof, "The Green Kitchen," 2020, Oil on canvas, 60 x 84 in © NIKKI MALOOF PHOTO
CREDIT: STEPHEN PETEGORSKY

For her entire career as an artist, Nikki Maloof has been afraid that she only has a finite number of paintings within her. Whenever she puts one on canvas, she's worried that she's tapped from the decreasing number of paintings still left — like eggs from an ovary, perhaps. "This could be the end," she always tells herself.

From the perspective of a critic who has watched her work for many years, Maloof is not running out of paintings; rather, her talent is swelling, growing, conquering all other painters, like the way the alien proto-molecule conquers human life in the television series *The Expanse*, if you'll forgive the reference. There's a sense, looking at the paintings in "Nervous Appetite," her current show at Nino Mier—the show closes on December 19—of being stuffed with visual language. Not stuffed in an unpleasant way, but rather stuffed to the exact moment of utter and complete satisfaction.

Maloof began the paintings in the show at the beginning of the pandemic. "It was such a bizarre time to be creative," she says. "I felt so many moments of paralysis, and yet, at the same time, having something to focus on was really good for me."

Maloof, who was trained in classical still life painting as an undergraduate at Indiana University—she went on to receive her MFA at Yale University in 2011—set out to paint fish. Painting fish, she says, is so absurd, but also so multifaceted. "There's a grossness and a beauty in the material," she says. "These transformations happen that you can't even anticipate until you're scratching some random itch that leads you to it."



Nikki Maloof, "Dismemberment," 2020. Oil on canvas, 62 x 50 in ©
NIKKI MALOOF PHOTO CREDIT: STEPHEN PETEGORSKY

Fish of all types appear in the paintings — dismembered and disemboweled fish, fish on plates, fish on ice, fish in frying pans. The fish are joined by other marine creatures such as sea urchins, octopus and crabs. Even though fish are everywhere in the paintings, they aren't the subject. The subject, instead, seems to be Maloof's consciousness—that of a painter and mother of two young daughters, trying to keep her shit together under insanely stressful circumstances, and managing, just barely. But so beautifully, as well.

"I'm always really drawn to situations that depict the multifaceted landscape of being a human," she says. "Those moments of intense anxiety peppered with joy."

For example, in *Preparation* (2020), Maloof shows a countertop composed of checkered tiles, upon which lies the components of a meal, laid out for preparation. Beneath the counter, three drawers are pulled open, showing various cutlery and kitchen implements. Each surface has a different pattern rendered in exquisite detail. There is a sense, looking at the painting, of the sort of panic a working mother feels at 5pm, with her kids at her feet, and dinnertime approaching. The subject is not the meal, but the feeling of being overwhelmed. She has emails to check, or ideas she's ruminating on, and she's tapped out of energy. One stubbed toe, or burned fish, and she'll be screaming on her knees until someone calls the police. But likely, she'll finish the meal, and start the same insane balancing act again in the morning.

"There is an aspect of putting my nervous energy into the painting, and finding a place of meditation," Maloof says. "I have these moments where the paint is really fresh and happening really instantly, without a lot of labor, and then these moments where there are long periods of tedium, knitting together these intense pleasure moments."

This balancing act is captured in so many of the paintings. In the way that the legs of a crab lay on top of a lace tablecloth, which itself lays on top of a blue cloth on a table, in *Dismemberment* (2020). Somehow, giving off the impression of being gently placed there. In *At The Fish Market* (2020), where types of food — limes, leeks, sardines, eggplant, lobster — are organized in such discrete sections that you know it was made during a time when Maloof was particularly organized in her real life.

The more you look at the paintings, the more they reward you. *Dinner is Served* (2020) is an entire Luis Buñuel movie within the frame of a single rectangle. The fabric on the tablecloth is the same as the fabric of the wallpaper, but still, through adept shading, the hard surface of the table itself emerges. In the center, two smoking fishes wrapped in chard, and accompanied by a tendril of octopus, cool down. Each of the four plates contain a scene rendered in the tones of blue delftware, which itself references Maloof's maternal ancestry. The scenes depicted in the delftware are surreal: a camel in an enclosure, visited by two lovers in 19th century garb; a lion in a cage in a bucolic landscape.

"When I started making those plates, it was the most joy I had in painting in a long time," Maloof says. "I just wanted more and more."

It's too easy to wrap that sentiment up neatly, by saying that everyone has to find ways to survive during 2020, so I won't. Instead, I'll say that I look forward to what Maloof does next, with her voracious, growing talent. Not many painters could capture the balancing act of consciousness in a series of paintings of dead fish. But Maloof, miraculously, can.

To learn more about the show, visit Nino Mier gallery's website. And to learn more about Maloof, visit her website.



Nikki Maloof, "Dinner Is Served," 2020, Oil on canvas, 54 x 70 in © NIKKI MALOOF PHOTO CREDIT: STEPHEN PETEGORSKY

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Interview with Nikki Maloof

Questions by Emily Burns



Nikki with her work.

Hi Nikki, can you tell us a bit about your background and what motivated you to become an artist?

I grew up in Peoria Illinois in a big family of 5 daughters. I was the typical moody middle child. I was the one sneaking away from the others to be alone in my imagination world. In some ways not much has changed. I always feel that I didn't so much choose to become an artist as it chose me. Making art, drawing, creating, was the one thing that came completely naturally to me. It was my one super power.

Can you walk us through your creative process and planning stages for the final paintings? Are the composition planned beforehand?

I spend a lot of time planning my works and thinking about compositions. For weeks before I start a large painting I am creating various drawings and small paintings which zero in on an idea, refining it along the way. It is only until I have done the preparatory work that I can execute a large painting. The small works become the blueprint and give me the confidence to execute a large work rather quickly, preserving the freshness and intensity of the moment of making.

Can you speak to the presence of Vanitas-like themes, such as the wilting or dead flowers, and the tiny skulls in your work?

Vanitas theme's are always tongue in cheek for me. I like that they are signifiers of historical painting and that their place in art history was to depict the ultimate topic: death and impermanence. Yet when I project them into my world, the seriousness becomes absurd. That tension between the silly and the serious is a theme I return to a lot.

Your work evokes a sense of the uncanny—serious paintings depicting friendly scenes akin to familiar children's book illustrations, and permeated with a sense of anxiety. Is there an overall mood or feeling that you hope to instill in the viewer through these connections?

I think I have always been attracted to art that pits multiple feelings against each other, like dark comedies and sad pop songs. The tension between multiple sensations within one artwork for me, symbolizes the human existence. We are always experiencing multiple emotions at once, and its a constant juggling act.

Have you always worked figuratively? When did you begin working in the way you are now? What was the evolution of your most recent series?

I have always worked figuratively. My brain just thinks in images. I used to paint people a lot more but became interested in these animal stand-ins as a way of getting away from the heaviness that figure painting can sometimes get bogged down in. I also like the symbolic potential of animals as well as their many forms. They lend themselves to a lot of discovery in a way that I wasn't finding through painting human forms.

Congratulations on your recent show at Shane Campbell gallery in Chicago, Separation Anxiety. This series of paintings seems to include a few new characters, including a black horse in a large painting with a vivid yellow sky in the background. Can you tell us a bit more about this show and the new work? Where do the ideas and characters originate from?

I came to this current body of work through contemplating domesticity. It seemed appropriate to use domesticated animals in interiors as a way of exploring my desires for a home and my recent move away from the city. I became attracted to the idea of animals which are both at home in a domestic space but also trapped within it, embedded in the walls and motifs.

Are the characters in your domestic scenes particular cats or dogs, or are the scenes from a particular location?

The characters and locations are not specific to real life but they are influenced by the world around me. I think I collect ideas from my day to day life, often subconsciously. Most of these paintings were made after I moved away from the city so I definitely absorbed a lot of specifics from my new location. For instance, watching the sun setting every day, noticing patterns on rugs and wallpaper, plant-life and New England architecture are all things that trickled in by osmosis.

Do you use any particular reference material when planning a painting like photographs, or your own pets?

I don't have any pets and I try to stay away from specific photos. I find the closer I look at the real world, I lose something. I have come to realize that the images are stronger when they are more about the way my mind generates these animals rather than looking at an actual animal. I do on occasion look at images for specific objects or aspects about the characters that my brain cant come up with but for the most part they originate from my head. Sometimes I look to favorite paintings from art history for ideas.

How do your watercolors and collages relate to the graphite drawings and paintings?

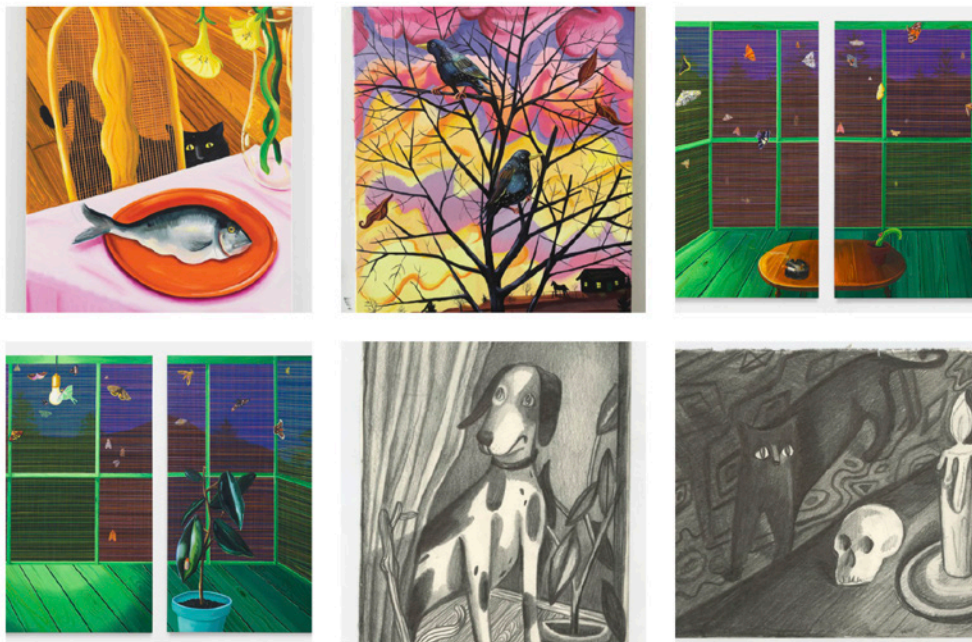
The collages and drawings originated from a desire to push my compositions further and to simply worth with different materials. Sometimes I just need a break from paint and canvas. Working with dry media and cutting up things can be a great way of getting out of your usual way of making. It's all about satisfying whatever creative urge I happen to have that day.

What artists have you looked at the most over the years? Who are you looking at now?

I have a very long list of influences but some that always come to mind are Munch, Matisse, Hockney, Alex Katz, Nicole Eisenman, Kerry James Marshall, and Catherine Murphy. Some other artists that I am super inspired by at the moment are Heidi Hahn, Jonathan Gardner, Sanya Kantarovsky, Louis Fratino and Jennifer Packer.

What have been some of the biggest influences on your life and your work thus far?

I've been lucky to encounter some pretty amazing people in my life. Barry Gealt was my teacher in undergrad. He is probably one of the biggest catalysts to my becoming an artist. He made me believe it was possible and that I had the power to do it. I also think just being around other painter-friends is a huge influence. We exchange ideas and help stoke each others fire. My friend Danielle Orchard is my main painting side-kick. I like to say she's my personal painting editor. She's a genius and an amazing artist. I send her countless images of things I'm working on for her approval. We are constantly talking about shows we've seen and artists we like, paint colors to try.



What is a typical day like for you?

On a typical day I wake up and take care of my daughter. We have breakfast and hang out for a while until and then she hangs with her Grandma while I go to my studio for most of the day. Then I listen to the radio on my drive through the winding roads of my town. I get to my studio and paint until the afternoon then get back, usually while the sun is setting, and then I have dinner with my family and wind down the day. I am a creature of habit. I like my little routines.

What type of studio scenario do you need to get work done? Can you tell us a bit about your work-space?

One of the things I like the most about being an artist is having a studio. I think I've always been a person who loves to carve a place out of the world for herself. Even as a child I was always searching for a secret spot to call my own. My studio is my haven. I like to keep it neat. I like to arrange it just so. The best time is when I just arrive and its morning. I get to see what I left there the day before and view it with fresh eyes.

Is there anything that significantly supports or destroys your groove or energy in the studio?

I used to be more rigid about my studio practice but I have learned to be more flexible now that I have a baby. I just have to get shit done no matter how much time I have or how little sleep I got the night before. I am more focused and less distracted than I was when I had all the time in the world. One thing that does throw me off is my stupid phone! I have to hide it from myself.

Has there ever been a book/essay/poem/film/etc that totally changed or influenced you?

Poetry became a huge influence though I did not grow up enjoying it. Catherine Murphy turned me on to Elizabeth Bishop when I was in grad school and I ended up taking some poetry courses. It totally changed my world. I am not eloquent enough to fully explain what it did, but something about the compression within a poem, the multiple angles that you can look at it, the lack of concrete "meaning" within a poem opened me up to looking at painting in the same way. I also love John Ashberry, James Merrill, and of course, Emily Dickinson.

What do you listen to while you work? Is this an important part of being in the studio?

I am a total podcast geek. I listen to SO many podcasts but mostly when I have gotten to the point in working where I don't have to focus as hard. Some favorites are Fresh Air (obviously), Hidden Brain and On Being. Lately I've also been listening to Sound and Vision which is a nice podcast about visual arts.

How important is the place where you live to your studio practice? This could include geographic location, city, neighborhood, community, etc.

Well, I am still a recent transplant out of the city, but so far I can say that living where I do has definitely



impacted me in that I feel a general higher sense of happiness and less stress. I have always been someone who enjoys observing nature so being surrounded by it, noticing its nuances is hugely enriching. I think that stuff trickles into the work in ways you can't always tell right away.

What is one of the biggest challenges to being a working artist?

Being able to afford to be an artist is a big one. NYC in particular is becoming an increasingly difficult place for young artists to sustain a productive practice. Everyone is running around trying to make ends meet on top of the difficulty of making good work. It can be really stressful.

How do you view social media and how has a particular platform impacted you as an artist?

I think the art world has benefitted from it. It's an amazing tool for keeping up with what's happening. I love knowing what people are up to and what shows are opening where. I don't know how I would stay on top of things without it!

You are based in Massachusetts, but show all over the world, including Jack Hanley Gallery, in New York City. Can you speak to staying involved, exhibiting, and making work while living outside of a major art city? What are some of the pros and cons?

For me the biggest pros are the ability to live in a place that I love, afford a large studio, and experience nature and beauty. I have more freedom here to work in my studio partially because I also live near my husband's family, so childcare was no longer an issue. That was a huge deal for me. The cons are obviously, distance from the things I love to do in NYC, like see art and being around my favorite artists but I am not so far that I can't still do that. I make it a point to get into the city regularly.

You worked as an artist assistant to Peter Halley in New York City, can you tell us a bit about how working for an artist affected your own practice? What were some of the biggest takeaways?

Peter hired me around when I moved to NYC after school. I was super excited to work for him. I also didn't have a job so it was a big relief. Being in his studio every day definitely changed my life. I got to observe the way he thinks about his work and the way he conducts his studio. He has a plethora of knowledge about the art history, the art world, and how to handle various professional situations. I think about many experiences I had there on a daily basis. Young artists benefit so much from getting to apprentice with established artists. It really prepared me for being in the real world. Not to mention, I got to be amongst some amazing people there.

Can you talk a bit about balancing being a new mom and a very prolific artist? It's truly inspiring!

I had a lot of anxiety about the idea of being a mom and an artist before I actually became a mom. As women mature in their careers it's impossible to not constantly hear about how difficult having a child will make things. When my daughter was born and I began to start working again, I realized that in actuality, you just have to find solutions for difficulties the best you can. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. These life changes propel you in ways you can't know until they occur, and often the benefits aren't discussed. I am happier now than I was before she was born. I also feel like it made me more productive! I work harder to prove that I can. Of course, having support is crucial. My partner and I are always striving to help each other achieve our dreams. That is a critical part of making it work for sure.

Besides art, what are some of the things that interest you or that you enjoy the most?

Now that I have a yard, I am so excited to finally have a garden. I also love cooking for friends which also goes hand in hand with having a garden so that's a double win!

Do you have any news, shows, residencies or projects coming up?

I am curating a show with Louis Fratino that I am super excited about. Our show is centered on flower paintings, something we have shared a love for. It's called "A Rose Is A Rose Is A Rose" and it will open June 24th at Jack Hanley Gallery.

Thanks so much for sharing your work and talking with us!

ART SY

August 7, 2020

17 Contemporary Artists Reimagining the Still Life

By Alina Cohen



Nikki Maloof
After Hours, 2019
NINO MIER GALLERY

The things we own—the clothes we wear, the objects on our tables, the furniture in our homes—tell stories about who we are, what we value, and where we come from. Artists who make still lifes create suggestive worlds, placing clues about their lives and their often invented, absent characters into their compositions.

The 17 contemporary artists below explore the material world through abstract painting, performance, craft, and digital media. As they capture objects ranging from bodega sandwiches to artist monographs, they document what it's like to live, consume, and simply make art today.

NIKKI MALOOF

Animals dead and alive fill Nikki Maloof's canvases—from fish, oysters, and lobster resting on plates atop a checkered tablecloth, to a caged bird or a cat gazing out a window. As vibrant as the works are, they also elicit a sense of confinement and angst. In *Cry Whenever You Need To* (2018), for example, a bird cage is lined with a *New York Times* page whose headline announces the work's emotional title.

The artist is inspired by the “lush textures,” “hyperdramatic arrangements,” and “symbolism” of the Dutch vanitas tradition. She's particularly drawn to the moments in the 17th-century canvases where it becomes clear that “the artists drifted into fantasy to achieve the drama they were looking for.” The closer she looks at these paintings, she said, the more they begin to “feel like stages for operas or plays about the everyday.”



Nikki Maloof
Still Life (for Dani), 2019
NINO MIER GALLERY

Malooof hopes to “heighten and expand” these ideas across her own works, creating psychological intrigue as she juxtaposes everyday objects and domesticated beings. Painting entirely from her imagination, she loves finding opportunities for “chaos and foreboding to creep” into her compositions.

Malooof’s upcoming show at Nino Mier Gallery in Los Angeles this November is filled with works centered around food preparation.

March 25, 2020

10 More Recipes From Famous Artists Who Are Getting Deliciously Creative in the Kitchen to Spice Up Their Lockdown Dining

By Sarah Cascone



Nikki Maloof, *The Midnight Kitchen*. Courtesy of the artist.



Nikki Maloof. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Nikki Maloof, Western Massachusetts

Nikki Maloof's paintings of animals have evolved to include domestic scenes, including kitchen paintings with fish ready to be prepped for dinner.

Truthfully, my cuisine hasn't changed a whole lot since the lockdown. I have a tendency to cook in a frenzy a few days a week. I try to sustain myself from the energy of those cooking days for as long as possible. That's why soups, stews, and braises are my go to. They are easy, comforting, and practical, because you can make big batches to eat later or freeze ahead. There's nothing better than when you've exhausted yourself working in the studio (or worrying about global catastrophe) and you have something at home cooked waiting for you in the fridge.

The recipe I chose is for Pozole Verde. I have been known to add anything I have on hand—corn, kale, beans—but hominy is essential.



Pozole Verde

Ingredients:

1 whole chicken
2 carrots
2 celery stalks
2 onions
1 head of garlic
1 bay leaf
1 bunch of cilantro
2 cans of hominy
1 can pinto beans

For the green sauce:

1 1/2 pounds tomatillos, husks removed
1 quartered onion
1 jalapeño (or more if you like spice)
2 poblano peppers, halved and seeds removed
5 whole garlic cloves

Instructions:

Put the first six ingredients and half a bunch of cilantro in a stock pot. Fill with water until it just covers everything. Bring to a boil, then reduce temperature and cook 30 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Remove chicken, and gingerly remove the meat from the bones once it's not scalding hot. Put the carcass back in and continue reducing the stock while you prepare the rest.

Heat the oven to broil setting.

Throw the sauce ingredients on a sheet pan. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with salt. Broil until there are charred parts here and there, and the tomatillos are soft. Throw everything in a blender with a handful of cilantro leaves and blend smooth. Taste and add kosher salt.

Strain the stock and put it back in the pot with the shredded chicken, green sauce, and drained cans of hominy and beans, and whatever else sounds good. Add salt to taste. Serve with dollops of sour cream, chopped cilantro, and a lime wedge.

ARTFORUM

March, 2019

Nikki Maloof's *Caught and Free* in Artforum Critics' Picks

By Wallace Ludel



Nikki Maloof
Anxiety, 2018

Nikki Maloof's drawings and oil paintings reward on multiple levels. At first blush, the connective tissue between them seems to be the reoccurrence of domestic animals and sumptuous, colorful patterns. But upon closer investigation, one sees that her anthropomorphized creatures—a dog, a cat, birds, and lots of dead fish—feel as terror-stricken as the rest of us.

In the painting *Fresh Cuts*, 2018, a skeptical feline gazes up from a Navajo-style rug, its body warped by a clear vase resting beside a pair of cartoonish scissors, open and limp, implying some oafish narrative. The bottom of a birdcage is lined with the front page of the *New York Times* in the canvas *Cry Whenever You Need To*, 2018. The work's title is torn from the paper's headline, which hovers above some generic picture of a war. Inside the cage, a depressed parrot appears as if he's spent the last week thinking about the Mueller report, Brett Kavanaugh, or any other part of the American shitshow that's been assaulting us over the last few years. *Anxiety*, 2018, is a painting depicting three long, thin fish, straight from the market and resting on another *Times* spread. We know they're deceased, but their abject, dread-filled stares suggest otherwise. "Maintaining a Sense of Hope Proves Increasingly Difficult," reads a header from the broadsheet beneath them. Beside the fish, a lemon has slithered out of its peel.

Bouillabaisse, 2019, is like an utterly modern Dutch still life. The assorted crustaceans of this image rendered in oil are scattered about a tiled kitchen counter—its design power-clashes with a cross section of salmon flesh. A despondent red snapper looks up, its big dumb mouth agape. Its large round eyes are either all-knowing or entirely vacant.

GARAGE

March 25, 2019

Nikki Maloof's Animals Are As Freaked Out As We All Are

By Scott Indrisek



NIKKI MALOOF, CANARIES (2019). ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK HANLEY GALLERY. PHOTO CREDIT: BRAD FARWELL.

Maloof's new paintings prove that even animals aren't immune to the perils of Trump's America.

The dog looks sheepish. The cats are freaking out. A bird appears comparatively chill—until you notice how desperately his talons clutch the perch. In Nikki Maloof's newest paintings, even animals aren't immune to the perils of Trump's America. The long shadow of current events is in the works, too, in the form of copies of the New York Times with headlines like "Cry Whenever You Need To" and "How To Be More Resilient In Utter Chaos." These pets are as confused as their human companions; if they could use the internet, they'd also be obsessively refreshing the page to read about the fallout from the Mueller report.

"I never want these paintings to be just about animals—they're really not about that at all," Maloof tells GARAGE. "They're always just a way of working out how I'm feeling about whatever stage or thing I'm going through." Indeed, the artist thinks of her painted animals more like "really great vessels" that can contain multitudes: fear, frustration, stress. Despite the menagerie present throughout her work, Maloof doesn't actually have any pets, though she did grow up in a home filled with all varieties ("I wanted to be an animal, basically," she says).

The works in "Caught and Free," on view through April 21 at Jack Hanley Gallery in New York, are some of



NIKKI MALOOF, FRESH CUTS (2019). ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK HANLEY GALLERY. PHOTO CREDIT: BRAD FARNWELL.



NIKKI MALOOF, DREAM OF SUMMER (2019). ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK HANLEY GALLERY. PHOTO CREDIT: BRAD FARNWELL.

the biggest and most intricate Maloof has ever made. That's partly the result of the much larger studio the artist acquired after decamping the city for South Hadley, Massachusetts a year and a half ago. "Compositionally, they've become more complicated, and that's another way for me to feel like I'm pushing them beyond just something cute," she says.

Bouillabaisse (2019) is a good example: a scene of various seafoods being prepared on a lushly tiled countertop. While it's also an animal painting of sorts, all the animals are dead. It's Maloof's attempt to riff on the traditions of Dutch still life painting, and the work contains similar tiny, loaded details—a fly alighting on an orange; a fork with its tines bent back rudely. There's also what might be a red snapper, whose lifeless face still telegraphs distress. While Maloof doesn't have the same affinity for marine life as she does for cats or dogs—"usually, fish don't really inspire my feelings," she admits—there's still a complicated emotional dance going on. "I doubt that [Dutch still life] painters had it in their minds to make them so expressive, but there's something about a fish looking up at you," Maloof adds. "If you could ever feel empathy for a fish, it would be in one of those moments."

Linger with these paintings and their surface cuteness does begin to dissolve. The cat staring at butterflies outside the window wears an expression of cartoonish concern; an open pair of scissors resting on a table suggests a violence held just at bay. There's also something charmingly off about the creatures themselves, which are varying shades of realistic. Maloof doesn't base any of them off of actual animals, and she avoids working directly from photographs. The results can be funny or unnerving—as with the dog in *Root Bound* (2019), which appears to share DNA with a javelina. While there are no humans in these paintings, they still contain the quiet wreckage of the human experiment.

Maloof's cats, dogs, and birds stare back at us, confused and sometimes scared, to ask a simple question: What the hell have you done? "When I think about animal paintings there's something sweet about them, and I never want anything to be too sweet," she says. "I want it to reflect an intensity."

ELEPHANT

Spring 2018

New Establishment-Nikki Maloof

By Ariela Gittlen



Nikki Maloof

“I have such respect for nature and the animal realm, but when I paint I’m not thinking about animals in a scientific way”

In Nikki Maloof’s menagerie the animals are quiet. Whether rendered in bright oils or more modest drawings on paper, the mouths of bats, cats and monkeys are often invisible or hidden. They’re undeniably cute, but their sweetness is modulated by an inarticulate anxiety. These creatures have so much to say, yet no way to speak.

Words: Ariela Gittlen

One review of your show at Jack Hanley gallery, which opened just after the 2016 US presidential election, suggested that the animals in your paintings transcended the country’s divisions—as if they’re somehow beyond politics. And yet when I look at them I see my own anxiety reflected in the animals’ faces. They seem worried about the state of the world. I think they are! The paintings aren’t about animal culture or humans’ relationship to animals. I think of them as vessels for my own feelings and experiences. Before painting animals I had been making a lot of figurative work and I was exhausted by the idea that when you depict a person all of this baggage of art history and identity is automatically projected onto them. When I first painted a monkey it had everything about feeling like a person without all of that extra stuff.

Are there other differences between painting animal bodies and human ones? When I was painting figures I thought: “I’m sick of painting these arms and hands and skin. I just want to paint something with fur!” There’s an endless amount of exploration you can do in the animal realm, and their different forms offer a lot of interesting painting ideas. When I first painted a bat I realized that bats have transparent wings!

Do you remember a time when you had a profound encounter with an animal? I've been intrigued by the animal world my whole life. I was the kid in the family who was always asking my dad to take me to the pet store.

The kid who was always bringing in salamanders from the garden? Salamanders, frogs, stray cats... but my profound experiences with animals usually go back to primates. I had a Christian upbringing, and in that environment you never ever think of human beings as animals. Evolution doesn't exist in that realm. I remember I was watching a David Attenborough special about apes when I had the realization that human beings are actually just very intelligent animals. My whole world sort of shifted.

It's difficult to talk about our experiences with animals. Sometimes those moments are beyond language. I'm attracted to things that are beyond language but are still intensely felt. I have such respect for nature and the animal realm, but when I paint I'm not thinking about animals in a scientific way. They're a proxy for my own experience rather than being about the plight of the animal world.

We're looking through a lot of semi-transparent boundaries in your recent paintings—a water glass, an open window, the bat's wings—all visual devices that make you conscious of being on the outside looking in. The concept of looking through something was a visual cue that I latched onto. Many of the paintings in my last show were about looking into a home from the outside. I was thinking about how I struggled with wanting a home of my own, but feeling like that domesticity was completely out of my grasp. Being a middle child I was always trying to carve out a space for myself; building a fort that was just for me or arranging my room just so.

Have things changed since your daughter was born last year? Everything is very different now, but not in the way I thought it would be. It's scary but it's also amazing how quickly you just adapt to a totally new routine. I can hardly remember life before it.

Women often talk about becoming a different person after their children are born, but men don't usually describe parenthood in the same way. Because motherhood is life-changing. I think if I were a man this new thing would exist, but when I went to my studio I would still feel like me. For women it's just so bodily. I've never felt my instincts the way I do now and that intrigues me. When you are doing something that feels so animal it jars you into realizing that we're just incredibly smart apes. My reaction to Isla's presence feels very animal, which is something I hoped would trickle into the work.

Do you ever work from photographs or other visual references? When I started to build up a visual language for painting animals I would occasionally try to look at a photo of an animal, but each time something about the result felt completely dead. I realized I have to invent the animal from my own mental vision in order for it to have the emotive quality I'm after.

Your paintings don't treat domestic animals differently from wild animals. There are certain animals I can't paint and certain animals I can. I have no idea why painting a bat feels really natural to me and yet every time I tried to paint amphibians or reptiles it was impossible.

You don't paint very many birds either. Which is funny because I had a pet parrot as a child. Up until that point all of my pets were little creatures that you can't have an emotional experience with, but with a parrot you really can. It was probably my first love.

Did it talk?
No, but it felt.



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ARTnews

March 2, 2017

Habitat: Fair Thee Well—Visits With Artists in Their Studios Before Independent New York

By Katherine McMahon

Artists are famously ambivalent about showing up at art fairs. John Baldessari once likened the experience to that of a kid walking in on his parents having sex. But showing one's art at them is de rigeur. Fairs—evolved from bazaars stocked with secondary-market material to, now, meccas for the new—are an integral part of the art ecosystem. In recent years, some have sprung up that try to improve on the trade fair model. Independent, founded by Elizabeth Dee and Darren Flook in New York in 2010 and since expanded to Brussels, is one such fair. A “curated” event, it is clubbier and more intimate than most art fairs—booths tend to blur and blend together, and the art leans toward the cool and critically lauded. This year's hometown edition, at Spring Studios in lower Manhattan in March, features some 45 international galleries and institutions. In its ideal state, as identified by co-director Alix Dana, “Independent incentivizes the creation of ambitious projects by encouraging artists and galleries to take risks.” For this installment of Habitat, ARTnews visited the studios of New York artists—all of them in Brooklyn—making new work for the fair.



Nikki Maloof and her in-progress work at her Greenpoint studio.

NIKKI MALOOF

At her studio in an industrial stretch of Greenpoint, Nikki Maloof evoked the notion of a tranquil sanctuary in multi-paneled works. “I wanted paintings to create an environment,” she said of the art to be shown by Jack Hanley Gallery. “The idea of a moth-infested porch seemed like the perfect fit.” Among the inspirations for her choice of format: Northern Renaissance altarpieces and Japanese screens.

December 18, 2016

After Midnight in Artist Nikki Maloof's Unsettling Menagerie

By Stephanie Eckhardt



Courtesy of the artist and Jack Hanley Gallery

1/7 "Loner" by Nikki Maloof.

Nikki Maloof may be based in Brooklyn, but the painter tends to fill her canvases with flora, fauna, and humanlike creatures not often encountered in the borough — slinking tigers and monkeys, rendered in lurid yellows and acidic greens. Things have taken a slightly darker turn, though, in “After Midnight,” her show now up at Jack Hanley Gallery. It’s one final, nocturnal testament to figurative painting’s comeback in 2016. From creeping snails to all manner of moths, get a look inside her latest menagerie, here.



CV



NIKKI MALOOF

Born 1985, Peoria, IL
Lives and works in South Hadley, MA

EDUCATION

2011 Yale School of Art: MFA, Painting/Printmaking

2008 Indiana University: BFA, Painting

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2020 Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2019 *Caught and Free*, Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, NY

2018 *Separation Anxiety*, Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago, IL

2017 *Chauve-Souris*, The Pit, Los Angeles, CA

2016 *After Midnight*, Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, NY

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2020 *What Did I Know of Your Days: Danielle Orchard and Nikki Maloof*, V1 Gallery, Copenhagen, DK

36 Paintings, Harpers Books, East Hampton, NY

Animal Kingdom, Alexander Berggruen, New York, NY

2018 *NY Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts*, The American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY

Cheeky: Summer Butts, Marinaro Gallery, New York, NY

2017 *30th Anniversary Exhibition*, Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, NY

Drawing Island, The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

Horror Vacui, or The Annihilation of Space, Misako and Rosen, Tokyo, Japan

A Forest on the Edge of Time, The Pit, Los Angeles, CA

2016 *The Great Figure Two*, The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

Imagine, Brand New Gallery, Milan, Italy

2015 *Let's Get Figurative*, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, NY

Tiger Tiger, Salon 94, New York, NY

Please Excuse Our Appearance, 247365, New York, NY



Immediate Female, Judith Charles Gallery, New York, NY

2014 *Buying Friends: The Kortman Collection*, Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts (UICA), Grand Rapids, MI

Don't Look Now, Zach Feuer, New York, NY

Other People's Paintings, Torrance Shipman, Brooklyn, NY

Do The Yale Thing, N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI

Shrink It, Pink It, Cathouse FUNeral, Brooklyn, NY

2013 *Summer Mix*, Thierry Goldberg, New York, NY

Diff'rent Strokes, Louis B. James, New York, NY

Deep Cuts, Anna Kustera, New York, NY

AWARDS

2011 Helen W Winternitz Award in Painting and Printmaking

2010 Gloucester Landscape Prize

2008 Glazer Award for the Arts

Hutton Honors College Creative Activities Grant

Harry Engel Award for the Arts