

# NINO MIER GALLERY

NEW YORK | BRUSSELS



NICOLA TYSON

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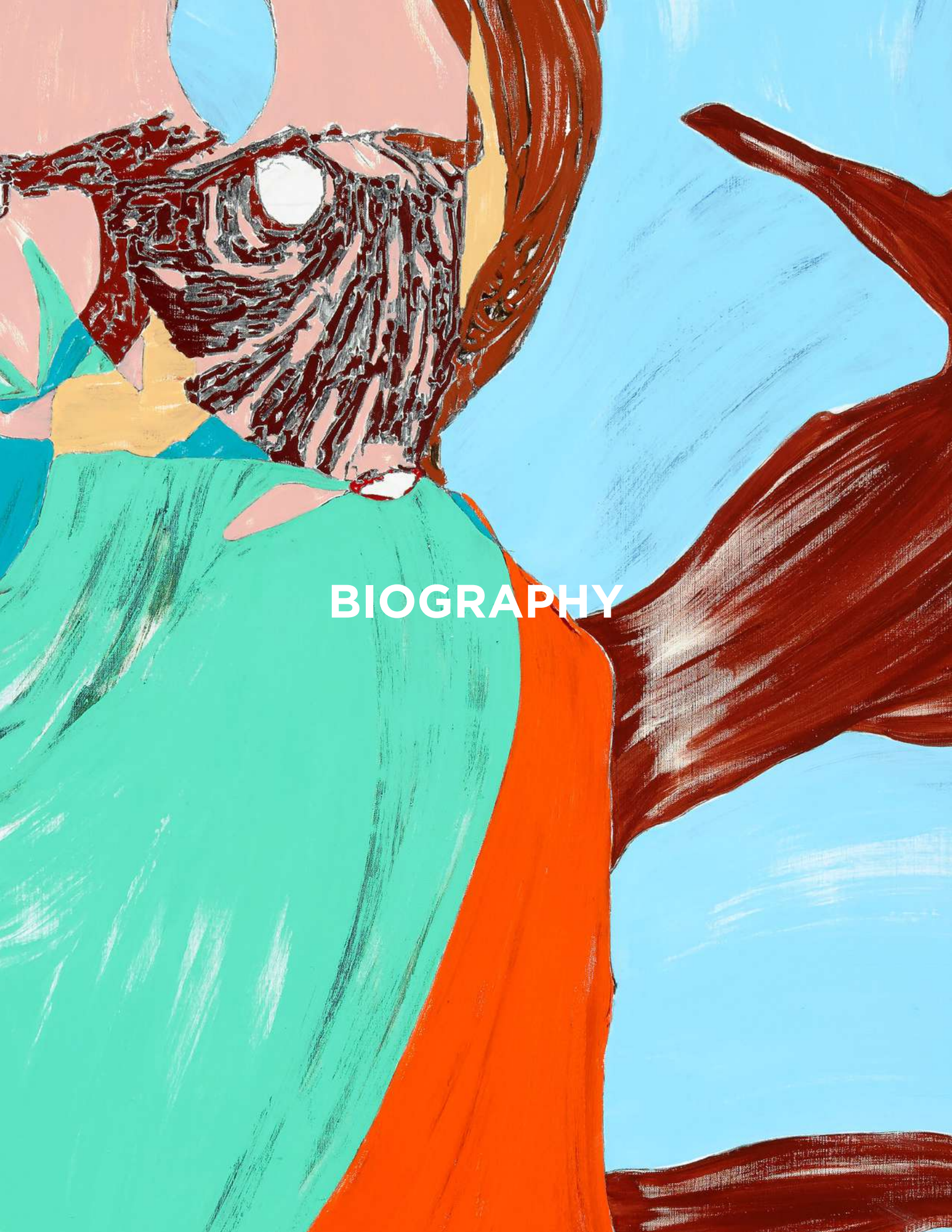
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# BIOGRAPHY

# NICOLA TYSON

**b. 1960, London, UK**

**Lives and works in New York, NY, US**



For over three decades, Nicola Tyson's influential explorations of embodiment and the female form have spanned not just painting, but also sculpture, drawing, and the written word. The artist distorts our experiences of identity and the structures which determine them—gender, sexuality, and (non-)humanity. Her biomorphic figures and painterly surfaces rattle our expectations of what bodies are, what they can do, and how they should be represented.

Tyson's work investigates what Julia Kristeva calls "the I that is not I." The artist probes those abject features of identity and embodiment that are simultaneously threatening, unnerving, revolting—and mesmerizing. She works with rich, bold palettes of acrylic paint to create visual worlds that teeter at the border of mimesis and formlessness. Upon first glance, clownishly distorted figures read as humorous and sometimes ebullient. But their whimsy belies an arresting intensity. Within her canvases, mannequin-like, segmented torsos glitch into abstraction, limbs unfurl like tendons or twigs, and faces devolve into fractal abstractions. Tyson likes to work with fleshy peaches, tans, and browns, and to leave small segments of her canvases bare, as though the paint were a layer of lacerated or degrading skin. Working in—and sometimes ironizing—a lineage of artists that includes Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach, and Hans Bellmer, Tyson toys with her surfaces and the figures that emerge within them, figures which are visceral but not quite human, that are dreamlike and beguiling.

*Nicola Tyson (b. 1960, London, UK; lives and works in New York, NY, US) attended the Chelsea School of Art, St. Martins School of Art, and Central/St. Martins School of Art in London, UK. Since, she has had numerous solo shows, including at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, US; The Drawing Room, London, UK; the Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH, US; Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK; and Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US; among many others. She has participated in group exhibitions at The Drawing Center, New York, NY, US; Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK; Neue Galerie, Graz, AT, and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, US; among others. Tyson's work is collected by institutions worldwide, including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, US; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, US; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US; the Tate Gallery, London, UK; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, US; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, US, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, US. Tyson has been featured in various publications including The Guardian, The New Yorker, Artforum, and Bordercrossings.*



# SAMPLE WORKS

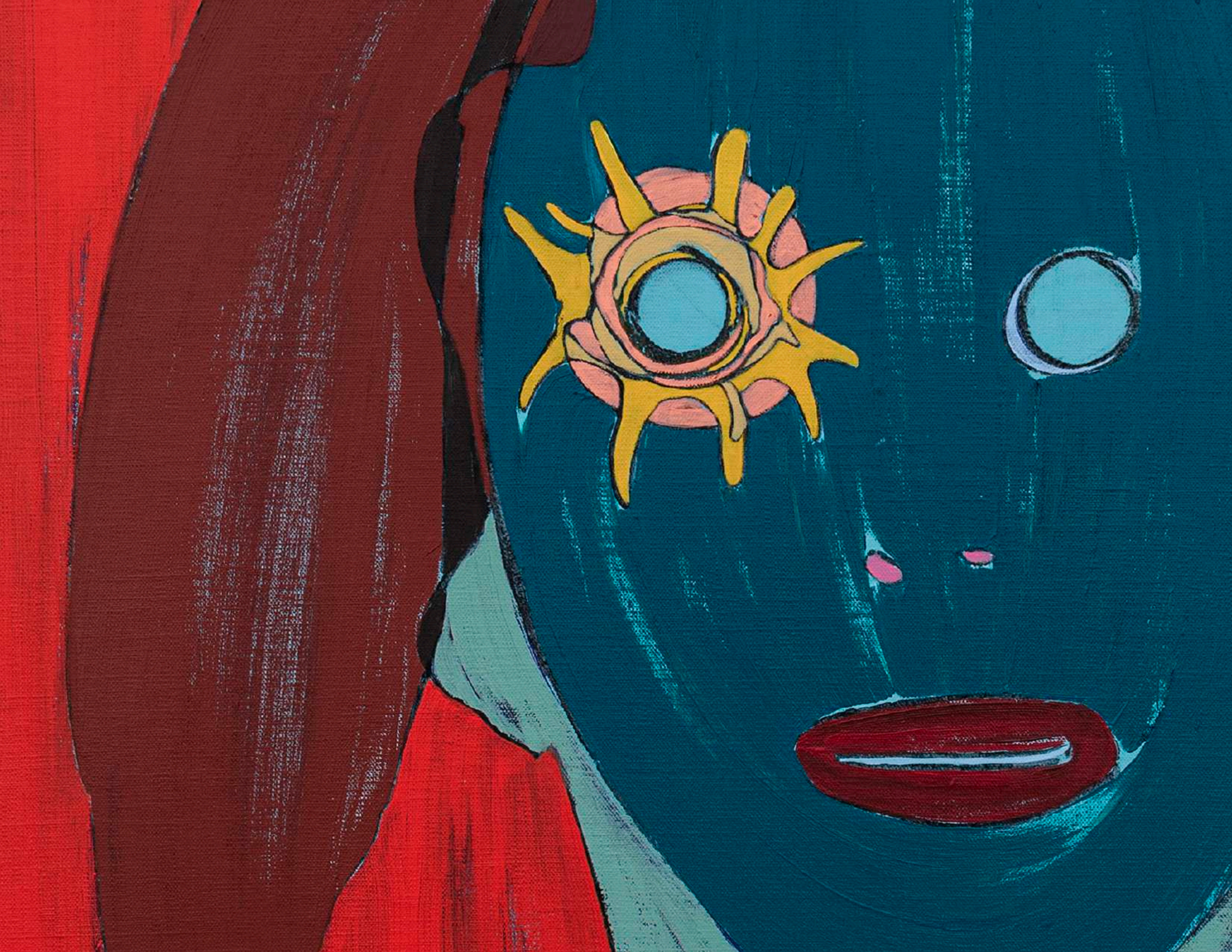
*\*sample selection does not reflect current availability*



*Siblings*, 2011  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 76 in  
152.4 x 193 cm  
(NTY21.005)

*Sun/Moon Face*, 2022  
Acrylic on linen  
31 1/2 x 26 in  
80 x 66 cm  
(NTY22.015)





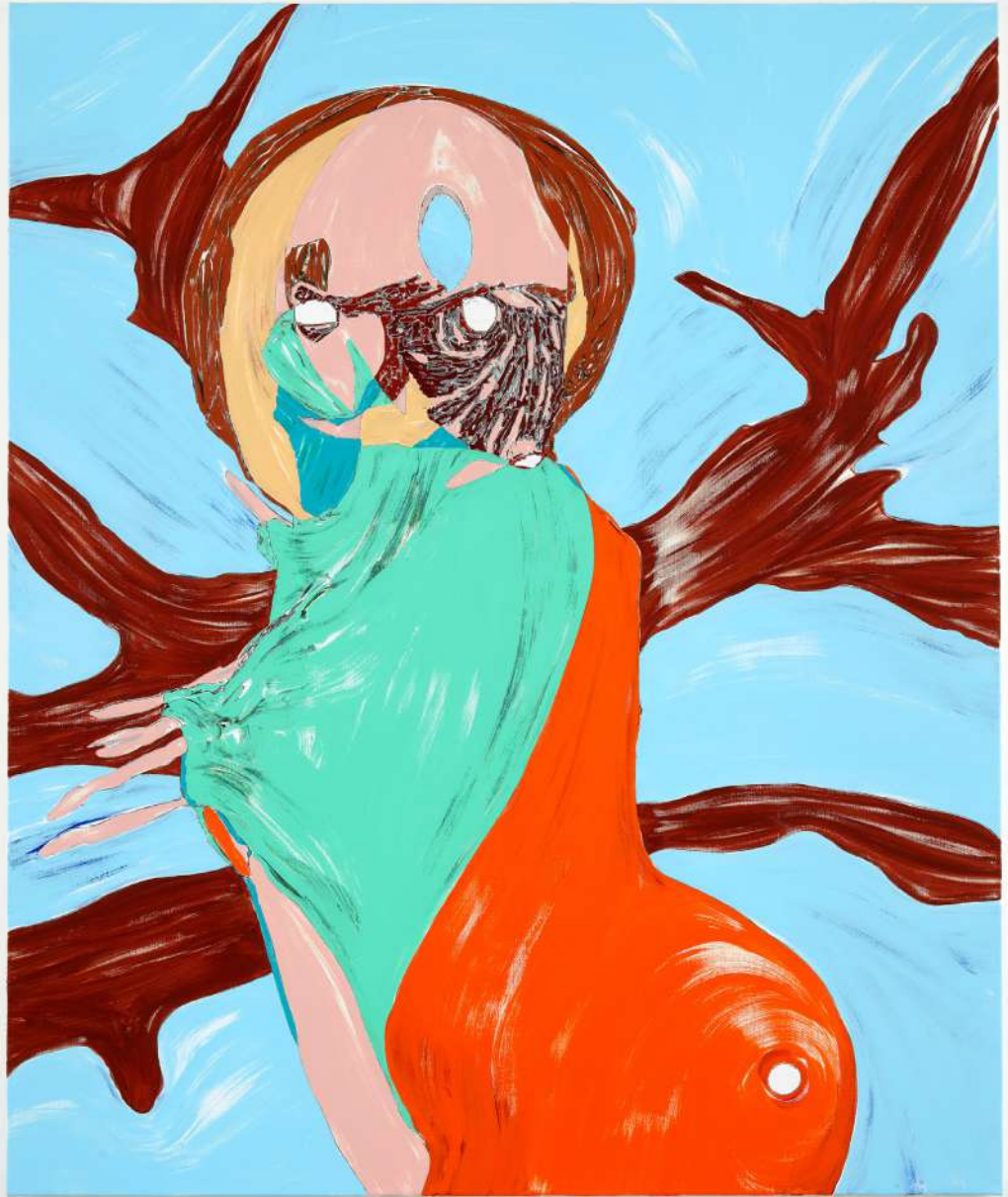




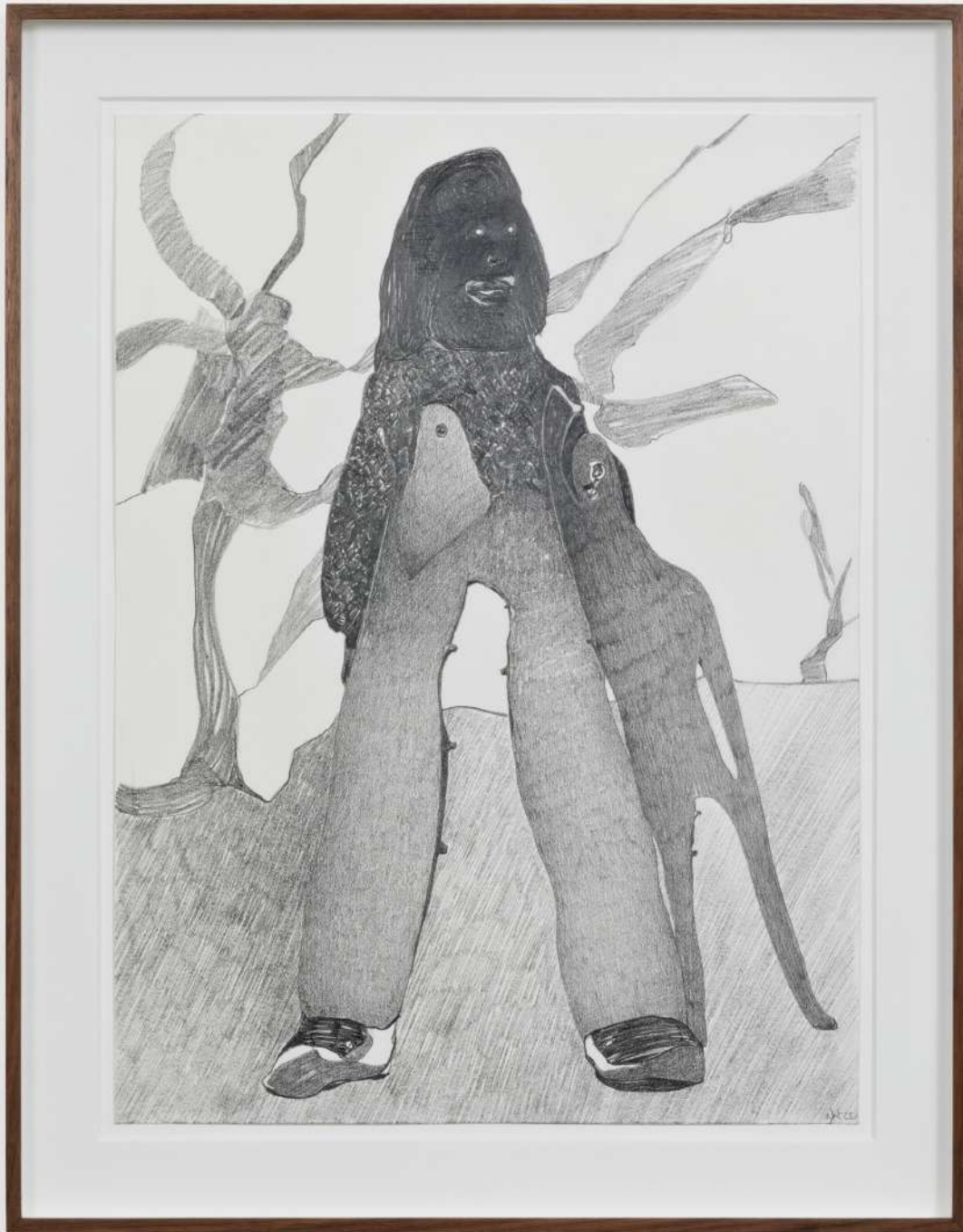
*Breathwork*, 2022  
Graphite on paper  
28 1/2 x 21 1/2 x 1 1/2 in (framed)  
72.2 x 54.5 x 3.8 cm (framed)  
(NTY22.032)



*Self-portrait: Artist and model, 2022*  
Acrylic on linen  
77 1/4 x 66 in  
196.2 x 167.6 cm  
(NTY22.009)



*Outside 2*, 2017  
Acrylic on linen  
72 x 60 x 1 1/2 in  
182.9 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm  
(NTY20.004)



*Mother and Child*, 2021  
Graphite on paper  
20 x 14 3/4 in  
50.8 x 37.5 cm  
(NTY21.010)





*Couple*, 2011  
Oil on canvas  
62 x 74 in  
157.5 x 188 cm  
(NTY21.004)



*Ladyboss*, 2022  
Acrylic on linen  
31 x 26 in  
78.7 x 66 cm  
(NTY22.002)



**SELECTED EXHIBITONS  
AND PROJECTS**



# SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

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***A LITTLE BIT TOUCHED***

2022

NINO MIER GALLERY  
BRUSSELS, BE

***WOMEN PAINTING WOMEN***

2022

MODERN ART MUSEUM OF FORT WORTH  
FORT WORTH, TX, US

***HOLDING PATTERN***

2021

SADIE COLES HQ  
LONDON, UK

# A BIT TOUCHED

2022  
NINO MIER GALLERY  
BRUSSELS, BE

Nino Mier Gallery is thrilled to present *A Bit Touched*, an exhibition of new works by UK-born and New York-based artist Nicola Tyson. Acrylic on linen paintings, graphite drawings, and acrylic monoprints will span both Brussels galleries from November 18 – December 17, 2022. This is Tyson's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

The exhibition's title, *A Bit Touched*, is a British slang expression for a person who is considered eccentric, unconventional, or lacking good judgment. Tyson wryly considers the phrase to crystallize both the content of her images as well as the process of making this most recent body of work. Continuing her experiments with the boundary between figure and ground, Tyson cultivates in a visual language of undulating, biomorphic forms that are humorous, and ebullient—but also solitary, violent, and abject. In *A Bit Touched*, Tyson toys with her surfaces and the little “bit touched” figures that emerge within them, figures which are visceral but not quite human, that are singularly dreamlike and beguiling.

Considering the site-specificity of the exhibition – two multistoried galleries with architectural eccentricities rather than large, white cubes – Tyson introduced an element of surprise rather than thematic uniformity within the works. Sometimes this nonconformity is incorporated into the image itself. In *Recliner*, a comparatively naturalistic small pink bird encounters an unlikely, schematic ‘woman’ reclining in a forest. In *Licker*, one figure throttles another, whose long tongue shoots out to connect with its aggressor's nose in an absurd feedback loop witnessed by a passing bird. And in *The Field*, two birds encounter each other mid-air, observed by a character standing beneath them in the titular field. Tyson notes that “‘field,’ in this painting, might reference the field of vision which in the imagination—unlike the rectangle of painting itself—has no limitations.”

The bold acrylics that have always characterized Tyson's palettes are here focused on fleshy peaches, tans, and browns; blood red; and various shades of cyan. Slender striations of color proliferating across her surfaces resemble the grooves of wood grain and disrupt the sterility of a cleaner color blocking technique. To achieve this, Tyson first lays a solid color down on her canvas, over which she draws an outline in charcoal to be brought to life with additional layers of acrylic paint. The original ground color peaks through each canvas like lacerated skin, forming the ultramarine visible throughout *The Field*, the pale blue between parted lips in *Hug*, the red oxide of the hand, eyes, and mouth in *Index Finger*, and the cadmium red of the eyes in *Suspended*. In Tyson's work, eyes are not the gateway to the soul: they are voids which deny the interiority and identity of her figures, offering instead the hypnotic pull of paint's materiality.



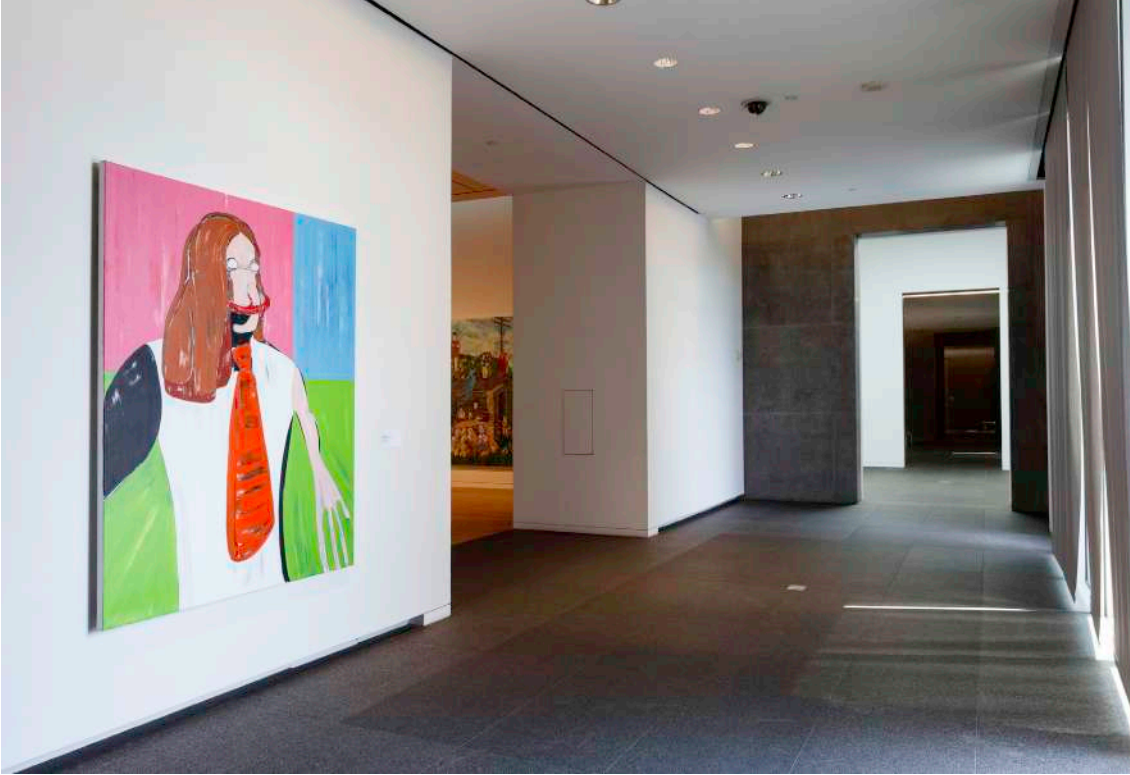
Graphite on paper drawings highlight the poles of disquietude and humor in Tyson's work. Visual puns form between the drawings and their titles, adding a levity to uncanny, creaturely representations. In *Breathwork*, for instance, a gaping mouth gasps for air as manifold eyes bulge above. Playfully and disturbingly, the taxing nature of work is reintroduced to what otherwise is now commonly understood to be a central practice of self-care.

Tyson's images hover between movement and stasis, her compositions vibrating with potential energy that Barry Schwabsky calls "life force itself". Achieving a

palpable physicality with each work is an important tenet of Tyson's practice. She describes: "much contemporary painting is cross-checked continually in its making with its digital version on screen (a kind of mid-production post-production process), in order that the final painting looks good—it's best in fact—digitally." But for the artist, "a painting must have an almost sentient presence in the studio, first and foremost [...] A painting is a physical, not just a retinal, experience and must engage with the viewer, much like a person, in real life. This is its real magic as a medium."





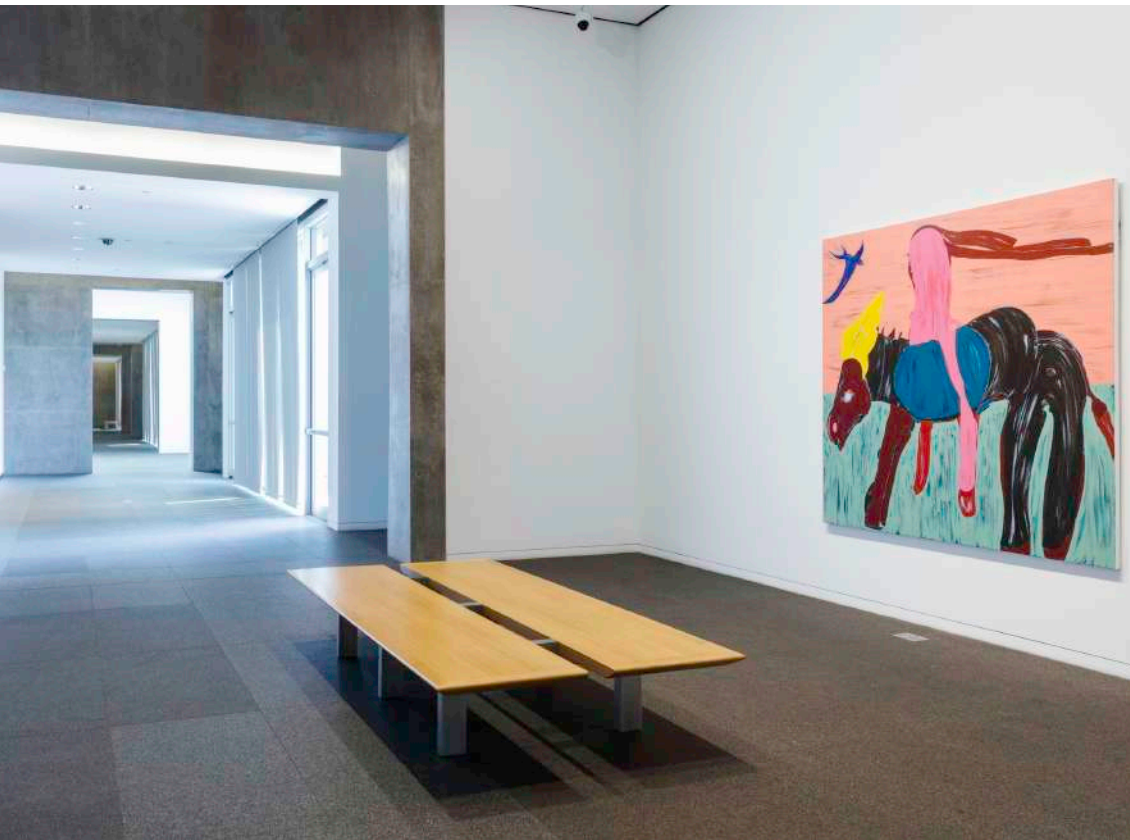


## ***WOMEN PAINTING WOMEN***

**2022**  
**MODERN ART MUSEUM OF FORTWORTH**  
**FORT WORTH, TX, US**

*Women Painting Women* is a thematic exhibition featuring 46 female artists who choose women as subject matter in their works. This presentation includes approximately 50 evocative portraits that span the late 1960s to the present. International in scope, *Women Painting Women* recognizes female perspectives that have been underrepresented in the history of postwar figuration. Painting is the focus of the exhibition, as traditionally it has been a privileged medium for portraiture, particularly for white male artists. The artists here use painting and women as subject matter as vehicles for change and range from early trailblazers like Alice Neel and Emma Amos to emerging artists such as Jordan Casteel and Apolonia Sokol. Some, such as Jenny Saville, work on large canvases, producing images that dwarf the space around them, while others, including Somaya Critchlow, paint on a modest scale that invites close viewing. All place women—their bodies, gestures, and individuality—at the forefront.

Four themes trend in the works included in *Women Painting Women*: The Body, Nature Personified, Color as Portrait, and Selfhood. Through these themes, the artists conceive new ways to activate and elaborate on the portrayal of women. Replete with complexities, realness, abjection, beauty, complications, everydayness, and joy, the portraits in this exhibition make way for female artists to share the stage with their male counterparts in defining the image of woman and how it has evolved.



*Photograph by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth*



## ***HOLDING PATTERN***

**2021**  
**SADIE COLES HQ**  
**LONDON, UK**

In her autumn exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Nicola Tyson presents nine new paintings alongside three groups of graphite drawings. Reflecting the close dynamic between painting and drawing that has activated her practice from the beginning, *Holding Pattern* builds on the artist's acclaimed survey at the Drawing Room in 2017, pushing her use of figuration and portraiture into experimental territory – a place, as she describes, of “pause, a hiccup of laughter, and release.”

In Tyson's new paintings, intensity of colour – applied in bold segments – is countered by a sense of mutability or suspendedness. Bodies cross into objects and vice versa. Space appears to oscillate between luminous flatness and intimations of depth. *Between the Trees* captures different organic structures on the point of metamorphosis or interchange: twin tree trunks slice vertically through the composition, framing a more tentative, disjointed stack of anatomic or cellular forms: a floral ‘head’ punctured by a radial eye, a turquoise orb suggesting a torso, two disembodied red hands, and a pair of coloured nuclei.

In *Hairpiece*, the body resolves – or separates – into a kind of landscape, a brilliantly striated formation that loosely suggests a head with a single recessed eye. Here and throughout her latest paintings, Tyson depicts figures or creatures that appear suspended between material and psychological states, as well as being freed from the constraints of ‘narrative’ or the structuring patterns of ‘iconography’. She has stated that her images “never lift off completely – or slide into narrative – even though something is clearly happening. Instead, they stay locked within the claustrophobic loop (*Holding Pattern*) of the painting's internal logic.”

The dual elasticity and intensity of Tyson's imagery suggests an interior state as much as a physical one, conveying the idea of ‘embodied experience’ – that is, experience relative to the individual body. Through a combination of hard-edged colour and ambivalent form, she evokes the interplay of perception, thought and feeling that characterises such experience. In *Pencil*, a female figure rendered out of amorphous planes of colour grasps a staff-like pencil in one of her magenta hands, wielding the drawing implement

like a weapon. The painting teeters on the edge of the cartoonish – the figure's pink head is featureless apart from the turquoise apertures of its eyes – and yet retains an air of radical open-endedness, accentuated by the flimsy blank sheets that hang in the background.

Tyson's art draws upon, and grapples with, that of artistic forbears as diverse as Maria Lassnig, Hans Bellmer and Pablo Picasso. (Her 2013 book *Dead Letter Men* verbalises this mode of combative engagement, in a series of missives to deceased male artists). Her practice has its roots in a 1990s moment when, as she has recalled, painting was considered "at best conservative and probably redundant," and yet she continues to assert the vitality of her medium from a contrary feminist mindset. "Art is a collaboration of sorts," she has proposed. "It

assumes you understand some of the rules – and that they can change – but that you, the viewer, will fill in the necessary blanks and complete the work, do half the work."

In three series of graphite drawings, Tyson tests and revisits the concerns of her paintings – those of psychology and anatomy, surface and depth, fixity and metamorphosis – at a condensed scale. Poised between lyricism and a sense of the visceral, her exactly-toned compositions span the emotive and gestural range of her practice, as critic Mark Harris has observed: "Tyson's work arrives at a baleful imaginary that oscillates between the recognizable and an assortment of peculiar contours and tonalities that rebel at their referential function."













**PRESS**

# PRESS

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**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

APRIL 2023

BY JASON FARAGO, WILL HEINRICH, ROBERTA SMITH AND YINKA ELUJOBA

**THE GUARDIAN**

MAY 2021

BY HEATHER PHILLIPSON

**ARTFORUM**

DECEMBER 2020

BY BARRY SCHWABSKY

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

JULY 2020

BY JILLIAN STEINHAUER

**ELEPHANT**

MAY 2020

BY EMILY STEER

**ARTFORUM**

NOVEMBER 2017

BY KATHY NOBLE

**ARTFORUM**

SEPTEMBER 2017

BY MARK HARRIS

**VANITY FAIR**

MAY 2013

BY LAUREN CHRISTENSEN

# The New York Times

APRIL 2023

## 10 Artists on Picasso's Enduring, Confounding Influence Faith Ringgold, Mickalene Thomas, George Condo and others talk to our critics about the visual world he helped create.

By Jason Farago, Will Heinrich, Roberta Smith and Yinka Elujoba



Clockwise from top left: Faith Ringgold; Derrick Adams; Mickalene Thomas; George Condo; Victor Ehikhamenor; Al Freeman; Didier William; Alexi Worth; Nicola Tyson. (Not shown: Rachel Harrison.) Credit... Clockwise from top left: Meron Tekie Menghistab for The New York Times; via Derrick Adams Studio; Photo by Emil Horowitz; Mickalene Thomas; via George Condo and Hauser & Wirth; Photo by Michael Avedon; via Gagosian; Photo by Jake Green; Al Freeman; via Didier William and James Fuentes; Erika Belsey Worth; via Nicola Tyson and Petzel, New York

Georges Braque, in 1907, looked at his Spanish friend's new painting, "Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)," and felt "as if someone had drunk kerosene to spit fire." Henri Matisse said he and his friendly rival from Málaga were "as different as the North Pole is from the South Pole." Pablo Picasso has been getting artists talking since those first days in Montmartre, and even 50 years after his death, they are still coming to terms with his influence — positive and malign, indelible either way — on what art looks like and how we talk about those who make it.

With the push to Cubism in 1909-1910, Picasso and Braque effected the greatest break in the rules of Western painting in 500 years, and artists in the postwar era often spoke of their own breakthroughs as a ritualized exit from his shadow. Later the Picasso inheritance grew knottier, with feminist historians and scholars of African and Oceanic art revealing the oversights and injuries of his omnivorous visual appetite.

Picasso has come down to human scale in the 21st century — and yet his influence lingers everywhere, from the fractured forms of contemporary portraiture to the digital collages of TikTok. I and my fellow critics Roberta Smith, Will Heinrich and Yinka Elujoba called up 10 artists to discuss how Picasso has been metabolized and reimagined today. These are edited excerpts from our conversations.



Nicola Tyson's "Self-Portrait: Red Tie" (2016), oil on canvas. Credit...via Nicola Tyson and Petzel, New York

## NICOLA TYSON

*Best known as a painter, in 2011 she compiled a series of satirical letters to famous male artists, including Picasso, as a limited edition book called "Dead Letter Men."*

In "Dear Picasso" (in my book "Dead Letter Men") I wrote, "A journalist recently asked me if, as a female figurative painter, I'd been influenced by you, which I thought was a bit like asking if my diet had been influenced by Monsanto. Unavoidable." He kind of personified how it was impossible to be a great woman artist in the 20th century. He defined the whole thing; it was a man's game.

But "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," of course, as an art student — and still — it makes me so excited. It's a painting that always makes me want to paint when I see it. It just brings you in and says, Yes, let's make, let's create, let's break the rules. A lot of his work got too closed down and formulaic. There's not a lot of interiority or nuance or feeling; it's all this sort of demonstration of vitality, or probably, he would think, virility. But in a painting like "Demoiselles d'Avignon," you're invited inside. It really makes you feel like, I want to do that, I want to get into that argument, I want to try out some stuff, too.

# The Guardian

MAY 2021

## **On my radar: Heather Phillipson's cultural highlights**

The artist, whose latest work is currently gracing Tate Britain's Duveen Galleries, on the joy of weather forecasts, a gripping memoir, and the greatness of Theaster Gates

By Heather Phillipson

Born in 1978 in London, award-winning artist and poet Heather Phillipson completed a PhD in fine art practice at Middlesex University in 2007. Her work encompasses digital media, music and sculpture, and she has published five volumes of poetry. Her sculpture *The End*, which depicts a cherry-topped swirl of whipped cream and transmits a live feed from a drone's perspective, is on the Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square until August 2022. Her latest work, *RUPTURE NO 1: blowtorching the bitten peach*, a new commission for the Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain, runs until January 2022, and her work will be part of Poet Slash Artist at this year's MIF.

### **1. Art**

Dead Letter Men by Nicola Tyson

I came to Tyson's writing via her drawings, which are strange and delicate mutants, like most of us. This book is a series of letters to men – first, the stranger that orders her to smile, then the big white guns of art history. On first reading, I couldn't respond, even in my thoughts, I was too cramped with glee. Tyson's writing is as precise as her lines – you can see whole new territories. That this correspondence arrives belatedly, and is therefore about as useful as putting letters in bottles and slinging them into the Pacific, makes it all the sharper.

# ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2020

## Barry Schwabsky on Nicola Tyson

By Barry Schwabsky



Nicola Tyson, *Big Yellow Self-Portrait*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 80 × 62 1/4".

Three of the eight paintings in Nicola Tyson's exhibition "Sense of Self" were designated as self-portraits, but they didn't tell you much about how she looks. First of all, they didn't have faces, usually a *sine qua non* of the genre. I can also assure you that, contrary to *Self-Portrait: Wings* (all works 2020), the artist lacks the feathery appendages common to birds, the ones covered in tiny iridescent scales boasted by butterflies, or the presumably more immaterial ones worn by angels. Likewise, if more prosaically, she did not (last time I saw her) have the massive body of the seated figure in *Big Yellow Self-Portrait*. Only *Self-Portrait: Stripes* might be a more plausible rendering, if only because the subject has been reduced to a generic verticality in the form of the stripes (mentioned in the subtitle) of the robe or whatever it is she is wearing. Maybe it's the painting's intense-blue background, but I was reminded of the pin-striped outfit in Henri Matisse's rendering of himself on the left-hand side of his great painting *The Conversation*, 1908–12. And for that matter, the other two Tyson self-portraits also seemed to recall, ever so discreetly, familiar works of art: *Wings* evoked Paul Klee's monoprint *Angelus Novus*, 1920, while *Big Yellow* reached further back into history to suggest, in a more general way, a late-Renaissance or Mannerist portrait—the arm depicted in Tyson's canvas, a massive blue oblong floating diagonally across the center seemed, as it were, to raise a defensive barrier between viewer and sitter. The image recalled those of the impressively clothed sitters in paintings such as Correggio's *Portrait of a Gentlewoman*, ca. 1517–19, or Bronzino's *Portrait of a Lady in Red*, ca. 1533.

In fact, all that signaled any of these as a self-portrait (beyond the titles) was the head of red hair each figure shares with the artist. Despite this sop to recognizability, it was clear from the exhibition's title that what was at stake was not the image Tyson sees in the mirror but something more like proprioception—an inner representation.



And for someone who has devoted decades to painting, it's only natural that a sense of self be articulated via the dense history of the art on and through which she's so often reflected. Tyson's references to modernist or earlier painting, calculated or casual as they may be, are more than knowing nods to the cognoscenti: They are part of a continuing effort to lay earnestly playful claim to the entire terrain of her art. And more than in most of the artist's past work, in these images the psychological freight carried by the figure seems less important than the chromatic and formal gusto with which she renders it. Klee's angel may be transfixed by the scene of history, but Tyson's has lift-off. Not all the pieces in the show were quite so ebullient: The Disconnect, more subdued, pictures two nearly abstract figures who can't quite click, while the unusually congested and disquieting composition Don't Look Back appeared to be a flayed close-up centered on a staring eye. But three still lifes of bouquets seemed to offer up portraits of the life force itself, in colors reverberating in all directions.

# The New York Times

APRIL 2023

## Five Art Accounts to Follow on Instagram Now

Our critic shares accounts that make her feel, think and see in new ways — something that feels especially vital right now.

By Jillian Steinhauer



**Nicola Tyson**  
(@nicola\_tyson)

The figures in Nicola Tyson’s drawings often seem haunted: elongated bodies, faces composed of blocky shapes filled in with dense pencil marks. In one striking image, above, that the artist posted earlier this month, there are voids where faces should be; the caption reads, in a twist of dark humor, “Out for a stroll with self.” The brooding psychological intensity of these works perfectly matches our current political and social mood. Ms. Tyson balances them out on Instagram with images of nature: her donkeys, turtles, drops of rain on a branch. Sometimes, there are stirring resonances, as in a photo of the sky followed by a rendering of a person who appears to look back at it, searching the bright blue expanse for a message or meaning.

# ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2017

## Kathy Noble on Nicola Tyson

By Kathy Noble



View of “Nicola Tyson,” 2017. From left: Outside 1, 2017, Outside 2, 2017.

Nicola Tyson’s painted forms are bodily. In some, I see human traces. In others, I see animals, trees, and plants. Her subjects are natural bodies—all living entities. They are not perfectly formed, however. Tyson creates them with light, broad sweeps of acrylic paint, using a dry brush, exposing slivers of white linen canvas, revealing the paint’s movement across the surface. Tyson’s recent exhibition “A Tendency to Flock” consisted of seven paintings in a rich palette of dark red, burnt orange, and varying shades of blue (turquoise, baby, sky) and (green forest) alongside numerous browns, pinks, and yellows, invoking qualities of flesh and hair that are not necessarily human. For example, *Outside 1* (all works 2017) depicts an entity that is animalistic in its rounded body complete with pink teats; plantlike via its bark-brown branches; and quasi-human in its facial traces. *Outside 2* is all animal: a body with a shell like that of a beetle moving across the ground horizontally on at least four legs.

Tyson’s paintings do not mirror the world that we see with our eyes. Rather, they invoke a kind of dreamscape; the forms are familiar, we understand them, but we cannot quite place how we know them, or where we saw them, or why we are seeing them again now. Our experience of them is not so much a cognitive knowing as a corporeal recognition. I felt I could reach out and grab the pathetic floppy teats hanging from the tree woman–guinea pig.

To describe Tyson’s approach to figurative abstraction the gallery’s press release refers to Austrian painter Maria Lassnig’s use of the terms *Körpergefühl*, meaning “body sensation,” and *Körperbewusstsein*, “body

awareness.” Tyson’s art does indeed conjure the experiential nature of corporality as a sentient body. But with its bold psychosexual forms, it is also performing critical work that is more complex than it appears at first glance. *Square Self-Portrait* depicts something that resembles a face, surrounded by swaths of brown hair, with horizontal, bone-like objects coming out of the shoulders and head—like an armature holding the artist’s head upright. The face has a flat, masklike quality, with numerous brown, pink, and green holes that could be eyes, nostrils, or windows to nowhere. If you didn’t look too hard, you could have read it as a Francis Bacon/Pablo Picasso mash-up. As it happens, in 2013 Tyson published *Dead Letter Men*, a book of missives addressed to deceased male artists, including these two. The letter to Picasso begins: “A journalist recently asked me if as a female figurative painter—as opposed to a figurative painter—I’d been influenced by you, which I thought was a bit like asking if my diet had been influenced by Monsanto. Unavoidable.” Tyson goes on to dissect Picasso’s role in early-twentieth-century primitivism and to decry his art-historical dominance. The book is a kind of diaristic account of Tyson’s relationship to an array of male modernist artists, positioned as a humorous critique of a gendered version of art history. Critical as she may be, Tyson’s abstracted bodies owe to Bacon’s deconstructions of the human form and psyche what Bacon—an artist with whom Tyson describes herself as having an s/m relationship—owes to Picasso’s brand of Cubism. Tyson’s biomorphic entities are carefully constructed assemblages, which critically incorporate traces of her predecessors into her own painterly language, resulting in a world that is vibrantly alive, aching with heavy corporality. Yet on closer inspection, these strange bodies are also brutally flattened, reduced to their thin layer of skin, to paint.

# ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2017

## Nicola Tyson: Drawing Room

By Mark Harris



View of "Nicola Tyson," 2017. From left: Outside 1, 2017, Outside 2, 2017.

Nicola Tyson's forty-six figurative drawings and monotypes here radiate urgency from their fiercely scored lines, febrile contours, and abbreviated limbs. There are no aestheticizing filters here—the violent immediacy of scraped ink and obsessive pencil hatching is thrust against us in these pictures of uncomfortable, sometimes brutally modified bodies.

The five large drawings along the back wall hit you first. Each shows a self-possessed and confrontational woman. In *Great Pants*, 2016, darkened whorls of scratchy pen lines suggest gouged eye sockets. Her mouth is a cancellation of broad slashes; her hair has the geometry of a helmet. This forbidding figure strides toward you on legs three times the length of her torso. The ink on these drawings has been applied rapidly—an explosion of marks that go from spidery thinness to vast swathes of black bandaging.

An adjacent room holds a set of smaller graphite nature drawings, visionary in their awkwardly looming close-ups of insects, birds, or lizards, as in *Hefty* butterflies begin their migration, 2015, where irregularly jutting, spotted wings crowd and tilt at one another like warplanes in a dogfight. Their alien angularities present a weird reality, as if experienced by the agitated subterranean creature of Franz Kafka's 1931 short story "The Burrow." Tyson's work arrives at a baleful imaginary that oscillates between the recognizable and an assortment of peculiar contours and tonalities that rebel at their referential function. We marvel at these agglomerations of abrupt gestures that evade any secure or rational knowledge of things.

# ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2017

## Nicola Tyson on Documenting London's Underground Punk Movement and Her Latest Photo Exhibit of "Deadly Glamorous" Cats Nicola Tyson: Drawing Room

By Lauren Christensen



In the course of her more than three-decade-long career, New York–based British artist Nicola Tyson has showcased her prolific oeuvre of painting and sculpture everywhere from Whitechapel Gallery in London to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, to the Petzel gallery and MoMA PS1 in New York. But contrary to her training at the prestigious Chelsea School of Art and Central Saint Martins College, Tyson also has roots in a distinctly more rebellious and irreverent milieu. Taking a decisive break from the more classical methods for which she has become known, the artist recently unearthed a stash of private photographs she took of the underground punk-rock club scene for “Bowie Nights at Billy’s Club, London, 1978,”\*\* on display at Sadie Coles Gallery in London this past winter. VF Daily caught up with the fledgling youth movement’s trusted witness to reminisce. Highlights from our chat:

*VF Daily: What about this particular juncture in late-70s London inspired you to record your surroundings in this way?*

Nicola Tyson: These photographs depict a moment when a new scene was being devised to replace punk, because punk had gone mainstream, and once that happened in the late 70s, it became so uncool. The very small posse of people who’d been involved in the scene in the early days diverted the movement into the club scene of the 80s. Back in ’78, when I took these photographs, I was literally documenting the first beginning of this nascent scene where a small group was gathering every Tuesday night in a sleazy gay club in London’s

Soho neighborhood.

*How did the underground punk revival distinguish itself from the mainstream version?*

In contrast to punk's aggressively monochromatic kind of look, this was all about dressing up in a kind of extreme and carnival-esque way. The more theatrical, the better.

*How did you first get involved with these gatherings?*

I was part of the punk scene as a young teen, and had been going around with these people and been wanting something more, like the rest of them. I'd been going to the punk clubs underage with a lot of the people featured in the photographs. I was 18 by the time these pictures were taken.

These photographs look more like photos you'd see on Instagram nowadays—kids just taking pictures of their friends when they're out at night.

Back in the late 70s, there weren't very many cameras around when you went out nightclubbing and stuff; even a pocket instamatic-type device hadn't been invented yet. So there were never pictures of this kind of event unless they were taken by someone in the press, and then they were usually black-and-white. But I actually knew how to use a proper camera, unlike most of the people down there. So I would come down with my full rig, an Olympus with the flash and everything, and take these professional-type press photographs. The following week, I used to bring the prints back and try to sell them for beer money.

*How did your subjects react to your taking pictures of them?*

Because I was one of them, there was this certain sense of "it's fine." This was a turning point when people started putting enormous effort into their outfits; it was all very theatrical. It demanded to have an audience. It was an oddly narcissistic scene.

By the end, the press was on to us. In the beginning of the 1980s, the group moved on to clubs that were more camera-friendly, like Blitz and Taboo. This archive records a really early stage when both the scene and its photography were being simultaneously worked out. In the 80s, the scene just became bigger and bigger.

*It is hard to find an obvious connection between this exhibition and all of your previous work. Is there one?*

I never made the connection myself, until I really looked through the photographs and realized how much of its content I'd used in my painting. I've always been quite an old classic kind of suit-and-tie—the fashion androgyny kind of thing. I didn't want to look like the other punk fans, outwardly. When I look back at the photographs, though, I think, Oh God, of course: all that bizarreness was clearly in me. It turns out it came out in the paintings later. This carnival-esque reinvention of the body came out in my painting, not in the way I dressed.

*On top of painting, sculpture, and photography, you've recently written Dead Letter Men (Petzel and Sadie Coles HQ), a book of letters to late artists like Francis Bacon and Picasso. Excerpts I've read are really hilarious—but also convoluted and confusing.*

Good, they're meant to be. That project started out as a joke, purely entertainment. I have to say, I just got such a rush writing those letters. It was like this dam burst of things that I wanted to say, but satirically. I don't really like to talk about my work very much; I've avoided discussing why I paint because I prefer to keep it enigmatic, even to myself. If you unpack it too much, it will evaporate. This letter project became a way of indirectly making a crazy associative network of thoughts so that you could see where I'm coming from without my having to point it out.

*So what's next?*

This sounds so crazy, but in 1985, the year before I went back to art school to study painting again, I did one final project, photographing cats with special backdrops. It sounds ridiculous, but they were so strange and arty. Now they're going into a show at White Columns here in New York, curated by Rhonda Lieberman, who writes for ArtForum. That was another project that was done for maximum hilarity, but at the same time, they're just deadly glamorous photos of cats.

A dark, textured, hooded figure with glowing eyes, set against a background of torn paper and a tree branch. The figure is the central focus, appearing to be made of a rough, fibrous material. The background consists of various pieces of paper and a tree branch, suggesting a collage or a layered composition. The overall tone is dark and mysterious.

# CURRICULUM VITAE



## NICOLA TYSON

b. 1960, London, UK  
Lives and works in New York, NY, US

### EDUCATION

1989 Central/St. Martins School of Art, London, UK  
1981 St. Martins School of Art, London, UK  
1980 Chelsea School of Art, London, UK

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *90s Paintings*, Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Nicola Tyson (a survey of drawings)*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2022 *A Bit Touched*, Nino Mier Gallery, Brussels, BE
- 2021 *Holding Pattern*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK
- 2020 *Sense of Self*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Four Paintings*, Sadie Coles, London, UK
- 2017 *Beyond the Trace*, The Drawing Room, London, UK  
*Mutual Admiration Society*, an exchange of exhibitions with Vielmetter, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, IL, US  
*A Tendency to Flock*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
*Paintings and Works on Paper*, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, US
- 2016 *Angela Dufresne and Nicola Tyson: Living Dangerously*, Reinberger Gallery, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH, US  
*Works on Paper*, Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2015 *GOODBYE/HELLO*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, FR
- 2014 Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2013 *Bowie Nights at Billy's Club, London, 1978*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK
- 2012 *Bowie Nights at Billy's Club, London, 1978*, White Columns, New York, NY, US  
Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2011 Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2009 Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK
- 2007 Marc Foxx, Los Angeles, CA, US  
Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2006 Friedrich Petzel, New York, NY, US
- 2005 Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, IE, (catalogue)
- 2003 *Heads*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Oeuvres Récentes*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, FR
- 2002 Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US

- 2001 Galeria Camargo Vilaca, São Paulo, BR
- 2000 Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, FR
- 1999 Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 1998 Galerie Natalie Obadia, Paris, FR  
Kunsthalle, Zurich, Switzerland, CH, (catalogue)
- 1997 Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US, (catalogue)
- 1995 Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London, UK  
Entwistle Gallery, London, UK  
Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 1993 Trial Balloon, New York, NY, US

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *Root Systems*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Beach*, curated by Danny Moynihan, Nino Mier Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Femme F(r)iction*, c1760, Academy Mansion, New York, NY, US  
*Rara Avis*, curated by Jerry Stafford, White Cube, Paris, FR  
*An Apartment for Ghosts: '57-'23*, Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2022 *Women Painting Women*, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX, US  
*Omelette Papier*, Capitain Petzel Gallery, Berlin, DE
- 2021 *Subscribe: Artists and Alternative Magazines, 1970-1995*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, US  
*Rewilding*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US  
*Drawing Biennial 2021*, Drawing Room, London, UK  
*Closer to Life: Drawings and Works on Paper in the Marieluise Hessel Collection*, CCS Bard, Hudson, NY, US  
*ART + NATURE + HOME*, Upstate Diary, Hudson, NY, US
- 2020 *100 Drawings from Now*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY, US
- 2019 *Summer Rental*, Rental Gallery, East Hampton, NY, US  
*Flora + Fauna*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK
- 2018 *Close: Drawn Portraits*, Drawing Room, London, UK  
*Nudes*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
*Self Collection: Bumped Bodies*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK  
*New Acquisitions*, Swindon Museum, Swindon, UK
- 2017 *Simon Denny, Sarah Morris, Joyce Pensato, Seth Price, Dirk Skreber, Hiroki Tsukuda, Nicola Tyson*, Petzel at Nanzuka, Tokyo, JP  
*SomeBodies*, Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Drawing Room Biennial 2017*, The Drawing Room, London, UK
- 2016 *Portraits*, Skarstedt, New York, NY, US  
*Belief + Doubt: Selections from the Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz Collection*, NSU Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, FL, US  
*Artistic Differences*, ICA, London, UK  
*Receipt of a Magical Agent*, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, US
- 2015 *The Marked Self: Between Annihilation and Masquerade*, Neue Galerie Graz, Graz, AT

- 2014 *The Naked*s, Drawing Room, London, UK  
*Dear Nemesis, Nicole Eisenman 1993-2013*, ICA Philadelphia, PA, US  
*New Dawn*, Silberkuppe, Berlin, DE  
*Readykeulous by Ridykeulous: This is What Liberation Feels Like™*, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, MO, US
- 2013 *Art, Club Culture, Fashion*, ICA off-Site, London, UK  
*Fracture and Fidelity: Painting Between Abstraction and Figuration, 1945 – 2010*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, US
- 2012 *I glove U*, Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA, US
- 2011 *Looking Back / The 6th White Columns Annual*, White Columns, New York, NY, US  
*Dark Christmas*, Leo Koenig, New York, NY, US  
*Readykeulous: The Hurtful Healer: The Correspondence Issue*, Invisible-Exports, New York, NY, US  
*A Painting Show*, Harris Lieberman Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*CLAP*, Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, US  
*Never Let Me Go*, Rhona Hoffmann, Chicago, IL, US  
*Kick in the Eye*, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA, US
- 2010 *Monster*, West Vancouver Museum, Vancouver, CA  
*A Site*, Teverina Fine Art, Cortona, IT  
*Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK  
*Vivid*, Schroeder Romero & Shredder Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Un-home-ly*, Oakville Galleries, Toronto, ON, CA
- 2009 *From the Sublime to the Ridiculous*, Teverina Fine Art, Athens, GR  
*Movement Schmoovement*, La Mama La Galleria, New York, NY, US  
*(des)Accords Communs*, FRAC, Haute-Normandie, FR  
*Works on Paper*, Faggionato Fine Arts, London, UK
- 2008 *Kunst Im Heim*, Capitain, Petzel Gallery, Berlin, DE  
*Second Thoughts*, Hessel Museum of Art & CSS Galleries, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, US  
*Out of Shape: Stylistic Distortions of the Human Form in Art from the Logan Collection*, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Poughkeepsie, NY, US
- 2007 *Gallery Artists Summer Show*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen, DK  
*Stuff: International Contemporary Art from the Collection of Burt Aaron*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI, US  
*At Home*, Yvon Lambert- New York, NY, US  
*Shared Women*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2006 *Drawn into the World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, US  
*Ridykeulous*, participant Inc, New York, NY, US  
*The Wonderful Fund - Collecting Art for the New Milleniu*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, West Sussex, UK  
*Traits pour traits*, Arthothèque de Caen, Caen, FR
- 2005 *Slices of Life*, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, NY, US  
*Les Grands Spectacles - 120 Years of Art and Mass Culture*, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Salzburg, AT  
*Present Perfect*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Art Now: Confronting Figures*, Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, VT, US
- 2004 *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy, London, UK, (catalogue)  
*Sexy Beasts 1963 – 2004*, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, NY, US  
*Esprit*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, FR
- 2002 *Gallery Swap* – Sadie Coles HQ, Sommer Contemporary, Tel-Aviv, IL

- Statements (six)*, Dornbracht, New York, NY, US
- 2000 *Hoxton HQ*, Sadie Coles HQ at Hoxton House, London, UK  
*Drawing on the Figure: Works on paper from the Manilow Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, US  
*Greater New York*, MOMA P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York, NY, US  
*Galerie Nathalie Obadia*, Paris, FR  
*Blurry Lines*, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan WI, US  
*Full Serve*, curated by Kenny Schacter, Rove, New York, NY, US
- 1999 *New Work: Painting Today – Recent Acquisitions*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, US  
*What Big Is*, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA, US  
*Looking at Ourselves: Works by Women Artists from the Logan Collection*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, US
- 1998 *Pop Surrealism*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT, US  
*Drawings IV*, Koplín Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US  
*Some Women/Pretty Girls*, Florida Atlantic University, Ritter Art Gallery, Boca Raton, FL, US  
*Chaos, Control, Chaos, Control. You Like? You Like?*, curated by Anne Lemieux, Elias Fine Art, Boston, MA, US  
*Galeria Camargo Vilaca*, São Paulo, BR  
*Art of Four Decades: 1958 – 1998*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, US
- 1997 *Recent Acquisitions*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US  
*Project Painting*, Basilico Fine Arts and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, NY, US, (catalogue)  
*Best of the Season*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT, US  
*Package Holiday: Works by British Artists in the Ophiuchus Collection*, curated by Sadie Coles and Pauline Karpidas, Hydra Workshops, GR, (catalogue)  
*New Work: Drawings Today*, curated by Janet Bishop and Gary Garrels, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, US  
*Drawings...an annual bi-coastal invitational*, Meyerson and Nowinski, Seattle, WA, US
- 1996 *Psycho-morphing*, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York, NY, US
- 1995 *Works on paper: Paul Myoda and Nicola Tyson*, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York NY, US  
*Revealing Desire*, Christinrose Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*In a Different Light*, curated by Nayland Blake and Lawrence Rinder, University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA, US
- 1994 *The Unsuccess Story*, curated by Kenny Schachter, New York, NY, US  
*Petzel/Borgmann Gallery*, New York, NY, US  
*I Could Do That*, curated by Kenny Schachter, New York, NY, US  
*Part FANTASY*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, CA
- 1993 *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*, The Drawing Centre, New York, NY, US  
*part FANTASY*, Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco, CA, US
- 1992 *part FANTASY*, Trial Balloon, New York, NY, US
- 1991 *Queer*, Minor Injury, New York, NY, US
- 1990 *Milch Gallery*, London, UK
- 1989 *The Whitechapel Open*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK
- 1988 *The Whitechapel Open*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2024 *Nicola Tyson: Selected Paintings 1993 – 2022*, essay by Jennifer Higgie, published by Nino Mier Gallery, Petzel Gallery, and Sadie Coles HQ, New York, 2023
- 2021 *Meeka Walsh, Belle Lettrists: Nicola Tyson, Maria Lassnig, Amy Sillman*, Bordercrossings, May 2021
- 2020 *Barry Schwabsky on Nicola Tyson*, Artforum, December 2020  
Jillian Steinhauer, *Five Art Accounts to Follow on Instagram Now*, The New York Times, July 2020  
Johanna Fateman, *Going's On About Town: Nicola Tyson*, The New Yorker, September 18, 2020  
*Nicola Tyson on "Sense of Self"*, Artforum, September 24, 2020  
*Nicola Tyson at Petzel*, Artforum, December 2020  
*Nicola Tyson*, Reflektor Magazine, February 2020  
Mark Harris, *Discovery Begins with Drawing*, Upstate Diary, April 2020  
*Nicola Tyson*, Collection Issue, May 2020  
*Nicola Tyson's Angry Pencil Drawings Perfectly Capture Our Uncertain Times*, Elephant Magazine, May 2020
- 2017 Mark Harris, *Critic's Picks: Nicola Tyson – Drawing Room*, London, Artforum
- 2016 *Nicola Tyson, Works on Paper*, New York, NY: Friedrich Petzel Gallery (exh cat.)  
Yin Ho, *Critics' Picks: Nicola Tyson*, Artforum, April 2016
- 2010 Stephen Chambers (ed), *The Royal Academy Illustrated 2010* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2010)
- 2009 Christian Rattemeyer, *The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection*, Catalogue Raisonné, (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009)
- 2006 Charlotte Mullins, *Painting People*, London: Thames & Hudson  
Francesca Richer and Matthew Rosenzweig, *No. 1: First Works by 362 Artists*, London: Thames & Hudson  
John Hutchinson, *Alabama Chrome*, Dublin: The Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2006
- 2005 Axel Hein and Wolfgang Schoppmann, *Most Wanted: The Olbricht Collection Cologne: Walther König*, 2005  
*Nicola Tyson*, (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2005) (exh cat.)
- 2004 *Summer Exhibition*, (London: Royal Academy, 2004) (exh cat.)  
Hubertus Grassner, *Moving Energies # 021*, (Folkwang: Museum Essen, 2004)
- 2000 Harmony Hammond, *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History*, (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2000)
- 1998 *Nicola Tyson*, (Zurich: Kunsthalle Zurich, 1998) (exh cat.)
- 1997 *Nicola Tyson*, (New York, NY, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, 1997) (exh cat.)
- 1996 Cherry Smith, *Damn Fine Art by New Lesbian Artists*, (London: Cassel, 1996)
- 1995 Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder, *A Brief History of Trial Balloon...: Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1995)

## COLLECTIONS

Tate, London, UK  
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA, US  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, US  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, US  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, US  
National Museum of Women in the Arts, DC, US  
Corcoran Museum of Art, DC, US

Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC, US  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, DC, US  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, US  
UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, US



# NINO MIER GALLERY

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