

Cathleen Clarke *The Night Grows Long*

Margot Samel is pleased to announce *The Night Grows Long*, a solo exhibition of works by Brooklyn-based artist Cathleen Clarke.

The Victorian Era begins in the West with the reign of Queen Victoria and spans the 1800's, where few things more haunting emerged than that of the role and spirit of the child. Across *The Night Grows Long*, Cathleen Clarke's first solo exhibition with Margot Samel, concepts of the child, the threshold of girlhood, one's proximity to mortality, and transformations of the unconsciousness of youth, are all taken up generations later in the wake and fallout of this odd and haunting history.

In *Wrong Side of the Bed* a young girl in a nightdress seems to slide out of a window, headfirst towards a carpeted patterned ground. Green hands emerge from a darkened elsewhere to her left, grabbing her legs and torso. Are they stabilizing her in her playful handstand, encouraging the mischief, or pulling her back into a darker dream-world, out of consciousness and out of frame?

Perhaps both: as industrialization accelerated during the nineteenth century, children were viewed as a human resource—crucial to the labor class. Widely distributed accounts of this growing workforce detailed gruesome conditions of many of their everyday lives. In parallel, an emerging genre of children's literature—and therein the Victorian child as literary subject—held many of these living and working conditions taken to be self-evident up to a mirror for re-articulation in the curious if not vulnerable eyes of the child. Born only 15 years prior to Lewis Carroll's iconic books *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *What Alice Found There*, Sigmund Freud would watch the fallout of these societies struggling with their conceptions of childhood, and develop his influential theories of psychoanalysis, where he believed personality was most critically defined in early developmental stages. The positioning of the child as a concept, between fantasy and reality, and the fetishization and friction of its seemingly infinite distance from mortality, is what Clarke traces with her paintings—rich with historic reverberation—up to our contemporary present.

Starting from old photographs given to her by friends or family members that connect her present to the past, Cathleen Clarke abstracts familiar subjects to describe these thresholds, particularly ones based in age or growth. Allowing for inspiration to interject with reality, illustrated children's books from the artist's childhood such as the complication *The Tall Book of Make-Believe* originally published in 1950 by Harper & Brothers, play significant—even subconscious—roles in each work's development. *Valentine's Day* depicts a crowded scene of school children from a few decade's past, playful and unplaceable, even hauntingly

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hostile. They appear here, illustrative, emerging from a ghostly wash of figures in the background, holding warped valentines and standing as a collective in mysterious stasis monitored by a tall dark figure to the left of the scene.

Inspired by the Laurel and Hardy 1934 film *March of the Wooden Soldiers*, in *The Sandman* a group of children drift off to sleep while a figure on horseback flies above, casting sand down on their heads and coaxing them towards the unconscious. Evocative of the hostile flowerbed encountered by Alice in Carroll's iconic tale, in *It's My Party*, Clarke traces a field of sleeping of girls. These works trace the playful enchantment of outings, fairytales, or sleepovers while young, engaging in the eeriness of the child's state of sleep: unbodied the subjects become dozing spirits both peaceful and deformed, melting into their background.

Style is a major tool for Clarke, whose expressionist method of underpainting red and green washes creates vibrating contrasting hues against the seemingly infinite black negative space that surrounds her figures. The friction of colors is a liminal-like optical illusion— each work appears as if it were a film still stuck between two frames. Film is not only an influence on Clarke's technique, but also in her references, citing surrealist cinema where filmmakers often pull symbols from bygone areas up to their present to reflect on their own abstracted experiences of time. In many ways *The Night Grows Long* is in itself a body of wandering cinema, cut from the edges of time, to reflect back upon the consciousness and constructions of youth.

Cathleen Clarke (b. 1988, Chicago, IL) received a BFA from the Academy of Art University. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Night Grows Long*, Margot Samel, New York, NY; *Hungry Soul*, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Whatever Hour You Woke There Was a Door Shutting*, Fou Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2021) Group exhibitions include *The Blue Hour*, Workplace, London; *Maskenfreiheit*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); *Holiday Capsule*, Platform Art, (2022); *Vanitas*, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY (2021); *tHP: Beacon*, *Satellite Art Club*, curated by the Honey Pump, Brooklyn, NY (2022); *Flat Files Program*, curated by Kate Mothes of Young Space, Collar Works, Troy, NY (2022); *Speculative Interiors*, NARS Foundation, virtual exhibition (2020); *Keep for Old Memoirs*, Young Space, virtual exhibition (2020); *Personal Space*, Collective131, virtual exhibition (2020); *Jip*, Gummies Gallery Pop Up, Brooklyn, NY (2019); *Affordable Art Fair*, with Collective 131, New York, NY (2019); *Giddy & Dreadful*, SK Art, New York, NY (2019); *The Body Responds By Lying Down*, NARS Foundation, Brooklyn, NY (2019); *Woman Made Gallery Pop Up Show*, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL (2018); *Her Mark: 26th Anniversary Gala*, Silent Auction, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL (2018); *Show 3: Feminism*, ArtShow Chicago, CC's Art Garage, Chicago, IL (2018); *Midwest Open*, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL (2018)

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¹ First Report of the Children's Employment Commission (1842)

² Writers such as Lewis Carroll and Charles Dickens were emblematic of this shift.