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ARTNEWS

CASEY KAPLAN NOW REPRESENTS JONATHAN GARDNER

BY Andrew Russeth

Jonathan Gardner, whose lush, richly colored, cartoon-inflected paintings abound with beautiful ladies (who are quite often topless), elegant patterns, and art-historical references, is now represented by Casey Kaplan in New York.

A representative for the gallery, which is based in Manhattan's Flower District, said that Kaplan first came across the work in 2014 and that they will host a solo show by Gardner in September 2016. Gardner has had one-person outings at Mary Mary in Glasgow, in 2014, and Corbett vs. Dempsey in Chicago, in 2011 and 2013, and was one in a two-person exhibition with Vanessa Maltese at Nicelle Beauchene in New York earlier this year.

In June, Mary Mary brought a selection of the New York-based artist to the Liste art fair in Basel, where they received quite a bit of attention. Looking forward to this upcoming show!



Jonathan Gardner, *Sculpture by the Sea*, 2015.
PHOTO: JEAN VONG/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND
CASEY KAPLAN, NEW YORK

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June: A Painting Show, Sadie Coles HQ, London

Jackie Wullschlager

Show traces ways in which the human form is reconfigured within the decorative, the diagrammatic, in styles folding together disparate influences



Jonathan Gardner's 'Interior Landscape' (2015)

An inspired, timely idea for a painting show: how the motif of the body persists and evolves as 21st-century painters abandon traditional figuration for non-realist idioms. Assembling work by emerging global artists, mostly in their thirties, the show traces ways in which the human form is reconfigured within the decorative, the diagrammatic, in styles folding together disparate influences, from pastoral to pop.

Chicago-based Jonathan Gardner's assured "Interior Landscape" reprises Modernist tropes — reclining woman in a studio interior with plants, window on the exterior, picture within a picture — in a flattened tableau in which elements are disjointed and rearranged as if by Photoshop. Iraq-born Ahmed Alsoudani presses teeming fragments against the picture surface to push alluring cut-and-paste compositions to the brink of indecipherability. Another Iraqi, Hayv Kahraman, adapts Persian miniatures and Arabic calligraphy into contemporary vignettes addressing the effects of war on women.

Filipino Rodel Tapaya's hallucinatory "Sound of the Healing Garden" collides figural and natural forms in an expansive all-over tapestry of bodies and objects — phallic-shaped plants, punkish and Gothic figures — to collapse pictorial space while playing with allusions from Bosch, Rousseau's faux-exoticism and Christian symbolism. And how to face the legacy of painting is the subject of Australian Helen Johnson's witty "Post-colonial Feminist Drama", where two blurry women confront a frieze of art-historical references.

Defining trends in 21st-century painting is an elusive quest. This bold attempt pinpoints the way artists express through the human figure some of the major tensions — coherence versus fragmentation, history versus immediacy — in contemporary art, and energetically celebrates its plurality.

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Art in America

Jonathan Gardner and Vanessa Maltese

at Nicelle Beauchene, through Jun. 28



Jonathan Gardner, *The Smokers*, 2015, oil on linen, 60 by 38 inches. Courtesy Nicelle Beauchene, New York.

Lookalikes of Marge Simpson's raspy-voiced sisters—or alternatively, the coy nudes of the Louvre's unsigned *Presumed Portrait of Gabrielle d'Estrées and Her Sister, the Duchess of Villars* (ca. 1594)—casually puff away in Jonathan Gardner's *The Smokers* (2015), faces obscured by nicotine clouds. The Léger-like women represent just one duo in an exhibition populated by doubles. Gardner's other paintings, of short-skirted tennis partners and layered faces peering out from behind a plate of fish, accompany Vanessa Maltese's geometric abstractions and undulating formica "backrest" sculptures, images of which make a cameo in her graphic paintings. Formal resonances between the artists' works underpin this feminine twinning, evoking the mysteries shared between pairs.

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frieze

Jonathan Gardner

Mary Mary, Glasgow, UK

The 17th century poet George Herbert is quoted as having said that 'living well is the best revenge', a piece of advice that came to mind whilst wandering through a recent exhibition of new paintings by Jonathan Gardner at Mary Mary.

Imagine being at the 1924 Salon des Indépendants at the Grand Palais in Paris and then finding yourself teleported to the future that is modern Glasgow. In this show of eight paintings, we encountered postures and conjunctions reminiscent of the great era of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse: an ear similar to the one sprouting from a eucalyptus tree in Joan Miró's *The Tilled Field* (1923–24); young women relaxing against gridded backgrounds with bare, geometric breasts, like those found in Fernand Léger's *The Three Women (Le Grand Déjeuner)* from 1921. The show's opener, *Inner Living* (2014), depicts the torso of a male figure that stands in front of a turquoise seascape, with a white-sailed yacht visible through a chiming triangular gap in his jacket. He wears a white belt and navy blue trousers; a yellow smiley button is pinned to the creased grey lapel. Who is he? Maybe he's a man living the good life, a man who really does think that living well is the best revenge. A man like that great forgotten painter of the Lost Generation – Gerald Murphy. Glamorous expatriates, Murphy and his wife Sara left New York and built Villa America near Antibes, on the French Riviera, in 1924, where their social circle included Ernest Hemingway, Picasso and Man Ray. Their close friend F. Scott Fitzgerald supposedly based the protagonists of his novel *Tender is the Night* (1934) on the couple.

In the texture of his pictorial taste, Gardner can be compared to Murphy. Gardner's work has a similar insouciance; a deft touch in the collage of objects. Like Murphy, he is an American painter responding – albeit at a remove of nearly a century – to the work of Picasso and Léger. Does that time lag matter? Probably not in the scheme of things – John Currin's updates of Lucas Cranach and Sanya Kantarovsky's Matissean evocations are only a couple of examples of the endless re-visitations that painting feeds on. Gardner also shares a tendency highlighted recently by Paul Teasdale in *frieze* ('What's so funny?', issue 167) for young painters to quote cartoons: is that Wilma Flintstone's bun hairdo in *The Rocks* (2014)? Gardner is attracted to details like an isolated slice of lemon or the pink band of Elastoplast on an ankle seen in *Torso Table* (2014) – what Calvin Tomkins, writing on Murphy in the *The New Yorker* in 1962 diagnosed as a 'style that lay midway between realism and abstraction, and an imagery that made use of commonplace objects presented in a bold manner'.



Zig Zag, 2014, oil on canvas, 1.5 x 1.3 m

Three women sit or lie on a patterned sky-blue mat in *Zig Zag* (2014): one topless, one tan-lined and bikini-bottom-less, one enjoying a cigarette, all with eyes closed. It is an image of unabashed, indulgent joy. The girls remind me of Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker, the languid pair in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), fresh from a game of tennis and luxuriating in a sultry afternoon, but now updated with flashy trainers. What is it with Gardner and footwear? Is he a more restrained Rudolf Schlichter or a more relaxed Bruno Schultz? Another canvas here is called *Superga* (2014) and features a girl wearing the eponymous pumps. Leather boots appear in *Torso Table*, *The Rocks* and *Wall Things* (all 2013). Similarly fetishistic are the contorted limbs of the figure in *The Rocks* that mirror the erotic imbroglio of Christina Ramberg's work. As a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where Ramberg herself was a student in the late 1960s, it is perhaps unsurprising that Gardner seems indebted to the artist and the work of her fellow Chicago Imagists.

One of the trio of girls in *Zig Zag* has put her book down. Perhaps she is reading *Tender is the Night*. These three figures reappear as cartoon outlines in *Women in White* (2014), recalling Picasso's almost identically titled 1923 masterpiece. Then it clicks: the inspiration for Picasso's *Woman in White* was supposedly none other than Sara Murphy. Gardner's visions share the unalloyed optimism of the 1920s life the Murphys knew on the Côte d'Azur and, in their gentle hedonism, hint that such pleasures do not last.

- John Quin