

# MIER

**LOUISE BONNET**

***PAINTINGS***

APRIL 23 – JUNE 4, 2016

MIER GALLERY is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Los Angeles-based artist Louise Bonnet. The exhibition will open Saturday, April 23, 2016 at 1107 Greenacre Avenue in West Hollywood, and will be on view through June 4, 2016. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, April 23, 2016 from 6:00pm – 8:00pm.

Louise Bonnet (b. 1970, Geneva) explores fleeting feelings of melancholy, nostalgia, and displacement in her portraits of cartoon-like, yet meticulously-rendered, characters. The exaggerated proportions of body parts and incongruous scale amplifies her depiction of emotions, making them more intense and complex in their absurdity. Bonnet creates a surrealistic atmosphere and palpable tension in her paintings that transforms what may seem mundane and everyday.

Sometimes at night, when sleepless, or perhaps when one is sick, there is this strange creeping and consuming feeling that parts or even all of the body, is big. They seem sort of inflated and bulbous, blossoming plumply outward yet without being cramped and uncomfortable like Goya's Saturn hunched in his cave. It is almost as if each Popeyed-limb is its own spacial dimension and is thus incapable of interfering with the others, opting instead for a kind of cosmic overlap; a multiverse of bloated mutation. This condition has in fact been described by medical science and is known as *Alice in Wonderland Syndrome* owing to the varying degrees of spatially related hallucinations that happen within the perceptual realms. Though more common in young children these perceptual distortions are also experienced by adults, often at the onset of sleep and/or in fever, and are caused by abnormal levels of blood flow to the part of the brain responsible for processing sensorial perception.

Blood flow; the cause of swelling such as bumps and erections.

These uncontrollable temporary aberrations of form - usually the products of accident and arousal - are not uncommon in the work of Louise Bonnet though perhaps one does not immediately perceive them thusly due to the seemingly innocent optimism of the cartoonish forms and figures we find in Bonnet's various paintings and works on paper.

Often afflicted with bouts of localized gigantism (most often at the nose), Bonnet's protagonists are strangely apathetic, content even in their disfigured states. One might think that these misshapen individuals would be sullen and withdrawn but in fact oftentimes, postures that could be interpreted as depressive can just as easily be explained away by a momentary and/or soporific loss in rigidity. For example, in one painting two figures dressed as if for some kind of racket and ball based sport sit on a bench, noses typically erect. The rightmost figure is slumped over himself, eyes half open whilst his companion to the left prods him in the shoulder. Rather than trying to rouse his partner from his dreary demeanor it almost as if the leftmost figure is in fact mockingly taking advantage of his partner's boneless flaccidity. There is a waxy, balloon like inflated-ness to Bonnet's universe; it is a place where things drip, melt, rise and fall, swell and stretch and, curiously, it is also a place where - to invoke a platitude - the eyes are not the window to the soul.

Though not exclusively, Bonnet often opts to obscure the eyes of much of the figures in her works and does so in a variety of ways. Sport headbands, bowl-cut hairdos, fringes (bangs), even strange condom-like hats are all used, alone or in tandem, to cloak the eyes and leave her protagonists blind. Or so it may seem. The artist herself has said that she *'finds eyes tricky because they soak up all the attention as the brain tries to read the*

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*face*'. This given becomes clear that it is not the characters in her work that Bonnet wishes to blind but us the viewer, Bonnet is directly cutting off our ability to read these figures, stopping dead the possibility of knowing something about them and their psychological states.

This leaves us then with the protrusions, the swellings and bulges. Though not actively trying to paint allusions it is however difficult not to read this from time to time when looking at Bonnet's work. However, rather than being about sexual desire perhaps it is more about the body doing things it is not wished to. For example, the spasmodic twitch of an involuntary erection finds parallel in Bonnet's gelatinous world that seems to cycle between the states of soft and firm. Bonnet's work, and indeed the characters in them are like the moment one falls asleep only to be immediately awoken by the falling of one's own head. The jello-jerk-wobble-loss-of-consciousness of the phenomenon perfectly exemplifies both the material nature of her depictions and our experience of them - innocence and innuendo, limp and erect - they are at once one thing and another and our encounters with them flit uncontrollably between various modes of perception.

In a documented anecdote related to *Alice in Wonderland Syndrome*, one sufferer recalls that in school they were taught that the feeling of disproportionately large hands was in fact a psychosomatic response to either the desire to masturbate or guilt over having committed the act. Perhaps too perfectly Freudian this anecdote obviously says more about the teacher that made it than it does the child that received it. However, in doing so, it consummately illuminates one of the primary underlying mechanisms in the process of experiencing Bonnet's works. Bonnet does not set out to paint fleshy obscenities yet as viewers we feel like we find them. This given, it is perhaps us that are the filthy ones, inventing erections and bare-skinned carnalities where actually there are none. With all our dirty-minded baggage we often forget that - to paraphrase an old Freudian maxim - *sometimes a nose is just a nose*.

— Gary Leddington, 2016

*Louise Bonnet (born 1970, Geneva) has been included in several group shows including Surreal, König Galerie, Berlin (2016); The Mini Show, The Lodge, Los Angeles (2015); and New Works, Subliminal Projects, Los Angeles (2008). This is her first solo exhibition and her first exhibition with the gallery. She lives and works in Los Angeles.*