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Aaina Bhargava, “Born in Mirrors: Under the Gaze of Claire Tabouret,” *COBO Social*, February 9, 2019

Born in Mirrors: Under the Gaze of Claire Tabouret

Dramatic, impassioned, and uninhibited, Claire Tabouret’s intensely raw, layered, depictions of relationships have taken up residence in Perrotin’s Hong Kong gallery space. On the occasion of her first solo exhibition in Asia, Tabouret speaks to us about her creative process, portrayal of love and relationships, and the necessity of a feminist perspective on sexuality.

Text: Aaina Bhargava

Images: Courtesy of artist, and Perrotin
Hong Kong.



Claire TABOURET, *The Kiss (blue and red)*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 99.5 × 79.5 × 3.5 cm | 39 3/16 × 31 5/16 × 1 3/8 in. Photo: Ringo Cheung. © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin.

“...In a relationship, you exist in mirrors, you see yourself in the eyes of the other, through the eyes of the lover.”

A palpable tension radiates from Tabouret’s canvases, channelling heightened raw emotions captured in the most intense moments they are experienced in a relationship. With each painting

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and work on paper she sets a scene, with each exhibition, an act, comprising a larger narrative – the context of her practice.

Your body of work started off with landscapes, and eventually the focus has shifted to strong figurative works, how and why did you make this transition?

For me landscapes were about memory, how a place can hold a memory of an event. Rather than depicting the actual action, I would choose to paint the place where the event had actually taken place. I found that even if there was no human present in them, you could feel a strong presence. Then I started painting boats, with lots of figures on them. in relation to what's happening (and has been happening) in Europe right now, with people trying to reach from Africa, and other places. In the beginning these paintings were very ghostly and distant so I started zooming in on the faces and the eyes, realizing how strong of a presence they had. The painting seemed to look at you (the viewer), and it became about how you look at the painting from where you stand, how you take a position. I was interested by this confrontation. Then as I focused in on the eyes, the works became about zooming in on details, faces and figures. For six years or so it's been about that.

Your work is very confrontational, and it has been mentioned that you're tackling your subject matter – love – head on, but ego seems to play a larger role. What are you striving address through confrontation?

There is quote by Oscar Wilde, which says, "When a couple makes one, which one?" There is this idea about ego. Can we avoid destroying the other? Can both exist in the same space, or is there way to make space for both?



View of Claire Tabouret's solo exhibition "Born in Mirrors" at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2019. Photo: Ringo Cheung © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin.

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Can you briefly walk us through your technical and creative process?

It's different with works on paper and paintings, though the subjects and compositions are similar. Usually I work on everything at the same time. I go back and forth, because I feel I learn things and I find ideas in the works on paper that I can use on the painting and vice versa. The works on paper are made with plexiglass, which are then run through a press so they are like a print – I go into this rhythmic process of printing continuously. On other days, I paint, and when I paint, I paint different paintings at the same time, 15 – 20 simultaneously. I like to move from one to another. I try to stay dynamic. It creates groups or narratives, a story made in one timeframe.

Materiality also seems to feature heavily in your work. What is the significance of the layered intertwined fabric?

I do use a lot of fabric, I really love fabric, sometimes they are nice ones, but sometimes they can also be cheap and gaudy. I keep a lot of fabric and tend to organize it by colors. Sometimes I pull out a fabric on a whim and am inclined to use it, but other times the fabric provides context. Like this fabric with the check pattern, made me think of an old couch, which I thought it could be the scenery for a sexual meeting for this couple. I stretch it out on the canvas and then paint over it.



View of Claire Tabouret's solo exhibition "Born in Mirrors" at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2019. Photo: Ringo Cheung © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin.

You've mentioned you view each series of your work as an act in a larger play or narrative, with each consecutive one building upon the previous. How would you say this show extends your narrative, in the larger context of your practice?

It's a way for me to explain the rhythm of the work, to show how new themes and new subject develop. For his particular show it's related to the research I've been doing for, a few years now, about the body and its relationship to body language. First I was interested in big group portraits. I was really struck by how we stand in a group and how it affects the space we physically take up with our bodies and the interrelation between power, stance, and group dynamics. This shifted to portraits of individuals.

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View of Claire Tabouret's solo exhibition "Born in Mirrors" at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2019. Photo: Ringo Cheung © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin.

How would you say this show extends your narrative conceptually? Does it bring or reflect something new you want to explore?

My last two shows were more about fighting, wrestling, and breaking up, which is when I started thinking about love, and that maybe all my artwork was actually about love. I started thinking of a love story in a more romantic way, like a love song – there are many songs and books which are written about falling in love, and breaking up. There are not so many paintings in which love is the main subject. I was challenged by this. I started working on a couple's relationship, focusing on the breaking up part. I feel this show is going backwards, as if to say, 'Oh, before they broke up, in fact they were happy, they were kissing and making love.' This show directly addresses sexuality, which was not in my previous works.

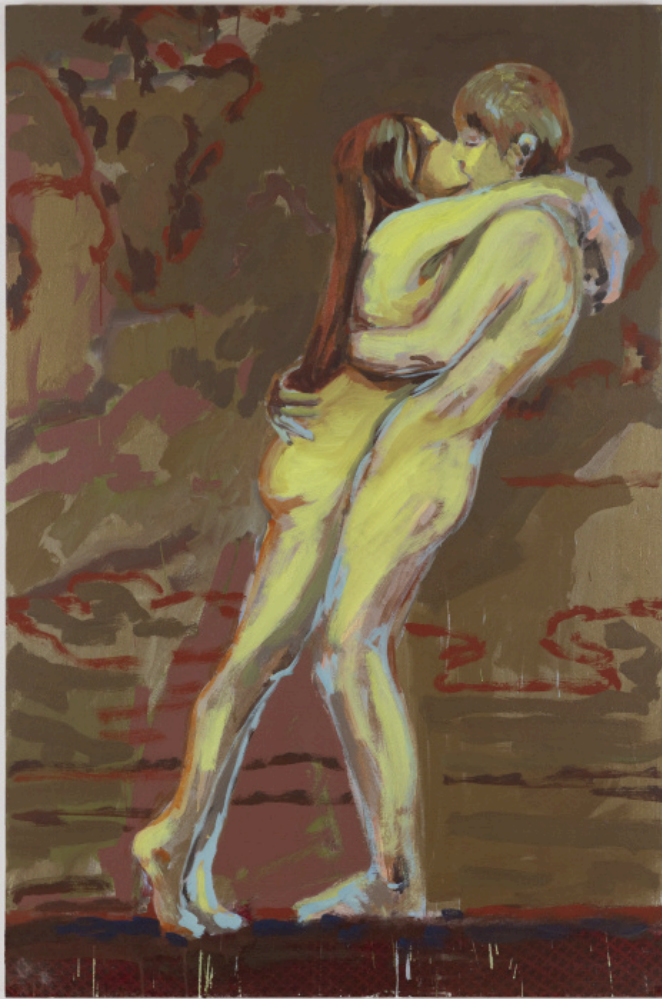
Speaking of sexuality, there is an under running commentary on voyeurism in your work, particularly situating the viewer as the voyeur. The title of the show is "Born in Mirrors," which clearly has allusions to reflection, perception and viewership. Could you elaborate on this thematic relationship, the significance of mirrors, and how (if at all) you intend the viewer to experience your works?

It's all about the gaze. When you paint, or sing, or write, you're expressing something to someone, you're trying to attract someone's – be it the public's – attention. There is something that exists in the eye when you desire someone. In a relationship, you exist in mirrors. In the eyes of the other, you see yourself. In this particular show, it has a lot of to do with the eyes of the lover. I need to see myself with their eyes. It's also the eyes of the viewer. Often imagery about sexuality is pornography. All of which is choreographed or composed or imagined for the viewer. It's the

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main reason for its existence. The people who are acting 'natural', trying to pretend they're doing something, are in fact very conscious of being watched, and in this sense, of the mirror. I was very triggered by this idea of an image which has been conceived to be viewed, because a lot of images we create nowadays, are done so by a very instantaneous mirror, with the intention to be seen, for example selfies and social media.



Claire TABOURET, Fall, 2018. Acrylic on fabric, 182.9 x 121.9 x 3.5 cm | 72 x 48 x 13/8 in Photo: Ringo Cheung © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin

triggered by his relationships with women, painting about love in a very cruel way, which I contradict but it's still relevant.

Often times these created images are very intimate, personal, and private in nature but are easily made public. Was this in your mind while you were making these images, did you paint them with the intention for them to be seen?

Yes. That's why I say "Born in Mirrors," the paintings were also born in mirrors in this way. I'm painting to show. Even when I didn't have shows in galleries, I was still painting for the public, with the intention for someone to see them.

A lot of your works are inspired by, or bear reference to iconic artworks throughout art history. What art historical movements and artists are you most inspired by?

I grew up looking at painting books. I would look at all these books and build a sort of a vocabulary in my mind. When I do a composition, I recreate a reference to something I loved as a kid or a teenager. For this show, I was looking at Edvard Munch, because he also made relationships, couples, and emotion the subject of his work. Also, Picasso was very

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Claire TABOURET, The Kiss (blue and red), 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 99.5 x 79.5 x 3.5 cm | 393/16 x 315/16 x 13/8 in.

Photo: Ringo Cheung © Claire Tabouret. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin

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Is there a difference in the intention with which you depict the male and female body? Would it be accurate to say there are feminist tendencies in your work?

Because I'm a woman, I'm aware of certain situations which makes my gaze different from that of a man's, and feminism inherently informs my perspective. It's interesting to make these sexual paintings, because they haven't been made by women a whole lot, which should change.

A female perspective on sexuality is important. Is that something you would want to address, particularly in today's political and social climate where #metoo is viral and one of the most influential cultural movements?

It's one reason why I won't back down, even if it can sometimes be challenging to bring these images and to show them in some places. One side of me doesn't want to be disrespectful to another culture and I can understand how it's perceived differently, depending on who's viewing them. Another side of me is also thinking about my responsibility as a woman artist is to project how I want to view the world. Some people won't like it, but I also think that's why I'm here – to push boundaries. I'm not interested in provocation, but am interested in showing the world through my eyes. I find there are not so many women who have had the chance to do so, and I feel lucky that I'm allowed to show free, happy sexuality. That which is not cruel, not forced, which is not rape. There's so much work left to be done in this area.

Claire Tabouret: Born in Mirrors

January 9th – February 23rd 2019

Perrotin, Hong Kong https://www.perrotin.com/exhibitions/claire_tabouret-born-in-mirrors/6820

Claire Tabouret was born in 1981 in Pertuis, France. She received her B. F. A. from École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris and studied at Cooper Union in 2005. She now lives and works in Los Angeles. Her works have been exhibited in multiple institutions, including Collection Lambert, Avignon; Villa Medici, Rome, Italy; The YUZ Museum, Shanghai; Palazzo Fruscione, Salerno, Italy; The Drawing Center, New York; the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Saint-Lô; the Palazzo Grassi, Venice; the Maison Guerlain, Paris; and the Galerie du Jour Agnès b, Paris. Her work has been acquired by major collections such as Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Pinault Collection, Agnès b, and FRAC Auvergne, among others.

Aaina Bhargava is the editor of COBO, as well as a staff writer. With a background in art history and emphasis on contemporary art, she has experience working for a diverse range of local and international art institutions. She has previously contributed to Design Anthology, Artomity, Asian Art News, museeum.com, and the Artling's online magazine.