

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

Ruby Sky Stiler

Self-Portrait with Palette

September 30 - October 30, 2021

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery is pleased to present *Self-Portrait with Palette*, Ruby Sky Stiler's sixth solo exhibition with the gallery.

Consider the occupational self-portrait in the history of painting. Who comes to mind first? If you've thought of Manet, Picasso, or Van Gogh—or Gauguin, Cezanne, or Munch—recall that this subgenre has long been an important tool for claiming and controlling representation—particularly for women. By showing themselves at work in everyday life, women have historically emphasized their professionalism, social roles, and (sometimes) economic independence, almost always in the face of formidable restrictions and a lack of recognition. Think of Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Leyster, and Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun wielding brush and palette, all the way to Florine Stettheimer, Amrita Sher-Gil, Frida Kahlo, Lois Mailou Jones, and beyond. And let's not forget Catharina van Hemessen's self-portrait from 1548, which may be the first to portray an artist, of any gender, at the easel. As Jennifer Higgie writes in her new book *The Mirror and the Palette*, van Hemessen's canvas appears today as “a form of protest.”

Ruby Sky Stiler takes up this vibrant history in her latest exhibition. Through sculptural relief paintings that extend her longtime imaging of women and her fluid approach to materials and mediums, she refreshes the meaning of the occupational self-portrait. Employing acrylic paint, acrylic resin, paper, glue, and graphite on panel, Stiler builds each palimpsestic piece up through an economy of means and streamlined forms and figuration. She also embraces a lusciously maximalist approach to patterning via a dazzling array of motifs echoing forebears and influences—from Gio Ponti to William Morris to Kate Spade—mixed in with her own invented designs and the occasional list or note, penciled in on the fly.

All self-portraiture presumes the existence of a mirror, a looking glass, or some other materially reflective surface, typically positioned somewhere outside the painting's frame. In two diptychs, Stiler plays with mirror images of the archetypal artist—a woman—standing while holding a palette, and her muse, a reclining male nude clasping a flower. In three other portraits she addresses the passage of time: one shows a grandmother, mother, and nestled child, while two more foreground the figure of the “old woman.” These recall the very first mention of a self-portrait made with a mirror. In *The Natural History* (77 AD), Pliny the Elder discusses Iaia of Cyzicus: “At Naples,” he wrote, “there is a large picture by her, the portrait of an Old Woman; as also a portrait of herself, taken by the aid of a mirror.”

Rounding out the show are two large-scale wooden sculptures engaging the gallery's walls. These group portraits—reminiscent of late compositions by Fernand Léger and the distilled sticklike forms in Picasso's *The Bathers*, 1956—offer a different but equally upbeat reorganizing of art historical schemas into something new. In one, female figures lounge before a standing female artist holding a palette, and two men who I like to think of as support staff. Here, Stiler is not offering a corrective or reimagining how art history could have been different, as she has done in previous bodies of work. Rather, at a moment when women's fundamental rights are being challenged once again, she celebrates how, if given access to a mirror, palette, easel, and paint, they have always shown themselves doing what they love—and how nothing could have stopped them.

— Lauren O'Neill-Butler, 2021

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Ruby Sky Stiler (b. 1979) has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Fairfield University Art Museum, Fairfield, CT; Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; Locust Projects, Miami, FL; Saint-Gaudens Memorial Park, Cornish, NH; The Suburban, Oak Park, IL; and Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, OR. She has been included in group exhibitions at Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, NY; The Berman Museum, PA; The Wellin Museum of Art, Clinton, NY; Providence College Galleries, Providence, RI; Perrotin, Seoul; Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran, Montreal; Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York; and JDJ, Garrison, NY, among many others. She received her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design, and her MFA from Yale University. Stiler lives and works in Brooklyn.

Stiler is the subject of a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY, on view January - June 2022. Her work can be found in the public collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the RISD Museum, Providence.