

DARREN FLOOK
106 Great Portland St.
LONDON W1

INDIA NIELSEN

M is for Madonna, M is for Mariah, M is for Mother

Exhibition: October 12th – November 20th 2021

Text by Juergen Dehm

In her first exhibition at Darren Flook, the London-based artist India Nielsen presents a new body of work she has created in recent months.

In her colourful paintings, Nielsen combines subjective images and fragments taken from recent pop culture through visual sampling techniques, comparable to the ones found in music, particularly in hip-hop and electronic music genres. The artist uses an extensive archive of images, screenshots, and photos of artworks, comics, or texts downloaded from the Internet, which she began to build up years ago and which is organized in various digital folders. The decisions as to which templates to use for a painting are often mood-dependent and instinctive.

The exhibition title "M is for Madonna, M is for Mariah, M is for Mother" can be understood on the one hand as a reference to the importance of music and pop culture for the artist, who grew up in the 1990s and 2000s: The songs of the American singers Mariah Carey and Madonna, for example, were hugely important to the adolescent India Nielsen; they were played on heavy rotation. On the other hand, however, this exhibition title refers to essential aspects relevant to the formation of the artist's identity as an adolescent, especially her Roman Catholic upbringing, and the development of her self-image from girl to woman.

Despite their apparent playfulness, Nielsen's colourful paintings are characterized by a tension expressed by the duality of suffering and redemption. The "sacred heart" for example, one of the pivotal symbols of the Catholic Church, representing Christ's love for humankind he showed through his suffering on the cross, is a motif Nielsen has been dealing with for a long time and which already appeared in her early works. In her recent paintings, a heart is divided, a toadstool broken apart in the middle, and a human heart sizzles in the focussed sunlight under a magnifying glass. Somewhere else, two nutrias in love find each other under a rainbow. The writing underneath the female figure of a saint – is it Mary? Mariah Carey? Or Madonna? – declares confidently: "We can do hard things." Her nimbus, pierced by knives, and her tears, however, deprive this sentence of its impact.

For Nielsen, who also writes and conducts interviews with other artists, the relationship between text and visual imagery plays a central role. Often it is the texts from opposing fields such as rap music and canonical literature that inspire new work. Nielsen's paintings are not based on predetermined concepts; rather, the artist makes her decisions during the painting process and strives for a balance between the components from her personal past and image fragments of more universal origin. Writing in her paintings can serve to express concrete statements as well as to make references in coded form. In some paintings, for example, ornate, intricate letters are scattered across the entire picture plane but refuse to form decipherable semantics at first glance. Instead, their materiality creates a specific texture on the surface, opening up a haptic dimension within the image.

India Nielsen sees her paintings as vessels in which her inner life, her memories, feelings, and projections can be inscribed and unfold. In her sleep, the artist often experiences intense dreams that subsequently enter the fantastic worlds of her paintings. She develops an intimate relationship with the characters she creates with brush and paint, drawing on her experiences with video games as an analogy. During the all-night game console sessions of her youth, for example, Nielsen developed such a strong identification with the respective main character that she became that character and was only able to distance herself from them again when they died. On the other hand, she was able to step back abruptly and put herself into an objective distance to the game a process, which Nielsen refers to as "zooming out." Switching between these two viewing modes was something Nielsen found highly irritating as a teenager. The balance between the subjective and the universal that she aims for in her paintings is largely based on this experience. Thus, she creates an independent visual language in her paintings that was highly shaped by personal experience, but which is easily comprehensible in individual parts, as these have become part of the recent pop-cultural memory.

India Nielsen is an artist who lives and works in London. She recently graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, having completed a BA in Fine Art at The Slade School of Fine Art. In 2021 she will have a three-person exhibition at Annarumma gallery in Rome, IT. She was in a two-person exhibition at Platform Southwark (London) in 2020. She has been involved in group exhibitions at Eastside Projects (Birmingham), Roman Road, Southwark Park Galleries, Collective Ending, The Residence Gallery, ASC Gallery, The Hockney Gallery, Gallery 46, The Horse Hospital, Tripp Gallery, Matt's Gallery, Limbo, The Peckham Experiment Building (London), Assembly House (Leeds), White Columns (New York), Spazio Amanita (Florence) and Im Labor Gallery (Tokyo). India was awarded The Villiers-David Bursary, Royal College of Art (2017) and The Steer/Orpen/Charles Heath Clarke Bursary, The Slade School of Fine Art (2016).