



**BLAIR SAXON-HILL**

***Shrimp Head Momma***

**October 15 – November 3, 2022**

**NINO MIER GALLERY | GLASSELL PARK**

Nino Mier Gallery is pleased to present *Shrimp Head Momma*, an exhibition of new works by Portland-based artist Blair Saxon-Hill, on view in Glassell Park from October 15 – November 3, 2022. Saxon-Hill's second solo show with the gallery features exuberant, fantastical, and colorful collages on panel.

Two types of figurative collages comprise this exhibition: first, mixed fabric works which sparingly employ other materials such as rope and telephone cord; and second, paper collages composed of monoprints the artist created in collaboration with Pace Prints this year. As a materials-driven artist, Saxon-Hill most often creates collages and assemblages from found objects and rare books, allowing their forms and material histories to inform her construction process. International curator Cecilia Alemani wrote of Saxon-Hill's work, "the first time I saw these works I was reminded of Italian artist Enrico Baj, who like Blair, loved to combine scraps of fabrics, trimmings, and found objects to compose seemingly grotesque portraits [...] Take a close look to appreciate all the details of the surface!"

*Shrimp Head Momma* is saturated with buoyancy and whimsy. As Saxon-Hill stated in an exhibition publication interview with curator Summer Guthery, conducted for the New Museum's 2021 Triennial *Soft Water, Hard Stone*: "I remember thinking about joy being revolutionary [...] I really try not to be ironic but rather to have a little bit of humor surrounding the work." Joy and power run strong in *Shrimp Head Momma*, which contributes to Saxon-Hill's ever-expanding cast of wild, queer, and raw characters.

In most of the works in *Shrimp Head Momma*, pieces of produce suggest facial features. For instance: in *Green Beans*, two interlocking beans form an eye, and two touching tomatoes form a mouth; in *Broccoli*, a tilted broccoli becomes a figure's head; and in *Blackberries*, the fruit stands in for gems on earrings and a necklace worn by a figure with radishes for eyes and lemon slices for hair. Saxon-Hill works in the lineage of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, known for his proto-surrealist portraiture in which figures are composed of carefully arranged produce and plants. Roland Barthes writes of Arcimboldo in *Arcimboldo, or Magician and Rhétoriqueur*, "His painting has a linguistic basis, his imagination is, strictly speaking, poetic: it does not create signs, it combines them, permutes them, deflects them – precisely what the practitioner of language does." Like Arcimboldo, Saxon-Hill's visual language is abstracted, generative, and comedic, assembling subjects from disparate, colorful parts.

Blair Saxon-Hill's characters are invocations of need, sacrifice, care and spontaneous exuberance. While the artist banks on elements of play to rouse her subjects into life from their flat and scrappy origins, it is the element of pathos that Saxon-Hill deftly executes as the most powerful facet of her oeuvre. A line graces the length of cheek from eye to chin or describes the tension in a shoulder as it pulls ribcage closer to ear. These delicate lines buttress the visual phrasing of pattern and composition, and



we are delightfully led through Saxon-Hill's virtuosic visions. They are a feast. And yet it is the pathos that we are undone by, the sharp recognition of an element of self through the story of other in which we are brought to our knees. We have gone untended. We are all untended- delicate, fragile, indiscriminately deserving, enduring. Blair brings us to these mythic revelations via her storied characters in ways we cannot quite explain. And yet, we walk away from them altered, opened.

- Amy Bernstein, Art Critic and Artist

*Blair Saxon-Hill (b 1979, Eugene, Oregon, US; lives and works in Portland, Oregon) has received the Oregon Arts Commission Fellowship, the Ford Family Foundation Fellowship, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Fellowship. She has exhibited with Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles; Pace Prints, NYC; WSU Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, WA; and JOAN, Los Angeles, among others. Saxon-Hill was included in the 2021 New Museum Triennial, Soft Water, Hard Stone. Her work has been covered by ArtForum, Frieze Magazine, LA Weekly, and The Brooklyn Rail, among other publications.*