

Alexis Soul-Gray

Immutable Fragments

July 22 - September 9, 2023

Opening reception Saturday, July 22 6-9pm

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.” - Lewis Carroll

Bel Ami is pleased to present *Immutable Fragments*, Alexis Soul-Gray’s first solo exhibition in the United States and the culmination of her two-year MFA at the Royal College of Art in London.

Alexis Soul-Gray’s unique process combining painting, drawing and collage allows her to performatively investigate how imagination illuminates a pathway forward through sadness and loss. Like Lewis Carroll’s journey through the looking glass, Soul-Gray shows how curiosity and experimentation peel back hidden layers, revealing the emotional life of childhood and how it conditions our perceptions and responses into adulthood.

Appropriating photographic imagery of mid-to-late 20th century family life from popular British magazines and books, Soul-Gray finds clichéd tableaux of women and children, choosing them for their artificial quality, “where family is often faked but also, somehow felt.” She then delicately draws out eerie moments that seem unexpectedly real, for example, a backward glance or a playful gesture. To break through the surface of these staged and stylized arrangements, Soul-Gray obliterates the facade by rubbing, scraping, or even using caustic chemicals like bleach. She paints over or collages the figures in an attempt to reconstitute their unstudied, piercing humanity (or punctum in the language of Roland Barthes). As the washed-away images become more transparent, the reassuring texture of the canvas, linen, or paper shines through. Through luminescent veils of blue and gold, Soul-Gray’s children, trapped in a vision of the past, suddenly rise to the surface with a burst of lifelike realism. In *Look Away* a kerchiefed girl is encouraged by the overlay of bright paint to venture to make eye contact. In several works, such as *Little Bunny Blue*, the figure disappears into a sea of abstraction, while others—for example a rare-self portrait, *Disqualified*—are left relatively unembellished.

For this exhibition, Soul-Gray sources illustrations from fairy tales and the nostalgic imagery of advertising, designed to invoke in the consumer their own desires and fears. The found images function as screen memories, referring to Sigmund Freud’s concept of a falsified image that stands in for an experience too disturbing to recall. Several years ago Soul-Gray began sifting through knitwear and clothing catalogs seeking traces of her mother, who was a textile designer, as a way to grieve her death and access painful trauma; when Soul-Gray was twenty-five, her mother chose to end her own life after suffering from cancer. “I am searching for touch. For a touch I cannot remember or perhaps never received enough of,” Soul-Gray says. In her vibrant compositions the stock imagery and fantastic elements surrounded by clouds of color and unpainted spaces reveal how our minds stutter and stall, or take off. In *Put In a Finger and Pull Out a Plum*, an adolescent girl prepares to do a cartwheel, while behind her storybook figures—a tiger and a bear and a baby doll—grin demonically, discouraging her or egging her on. A wall-sized work, *The Waves at Biarritz*, shows athletic women—a dancer and a swimmer—attempting to emerge from a foreground of scribbled lines suggesting floral patterns, bubbles and jazz.

In contrast to the immutable memory, Soul-Gray’s dreams dissolve, metamorphose, or leap off the canvas. They refuse to be stilled.

Alexis Soul-Gray (b. 1980, UK), lives and works in Devon. She earned an MA in Painting at The Royal College of Art, London (2023) and a BA in Drawing at Camberwell College of Arts, London (2003). She is an alumni of The Royal Drawing School, London having completed the Postgraduate Drawing Year in 2007. Solo exhibitions include Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm (2022); Irving Contemporary, Oxford (2022); Exeter Phoenix Gallery, Exeter (2022); and Delphian Gallery, London (2021). Recent group exhibitions include *Paper*, Tristan Hoare Gallery, London (2023); *Conscious Unconscious*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2023); *Women Celebrating Surrealism*, Islington Arts Factory, London (2022); *What Was Lost*, PAPER Gallery, Manchester (2022). She was the winner of the Delphian Open in 2021 and recipient of The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant in both 2021 and 2022.



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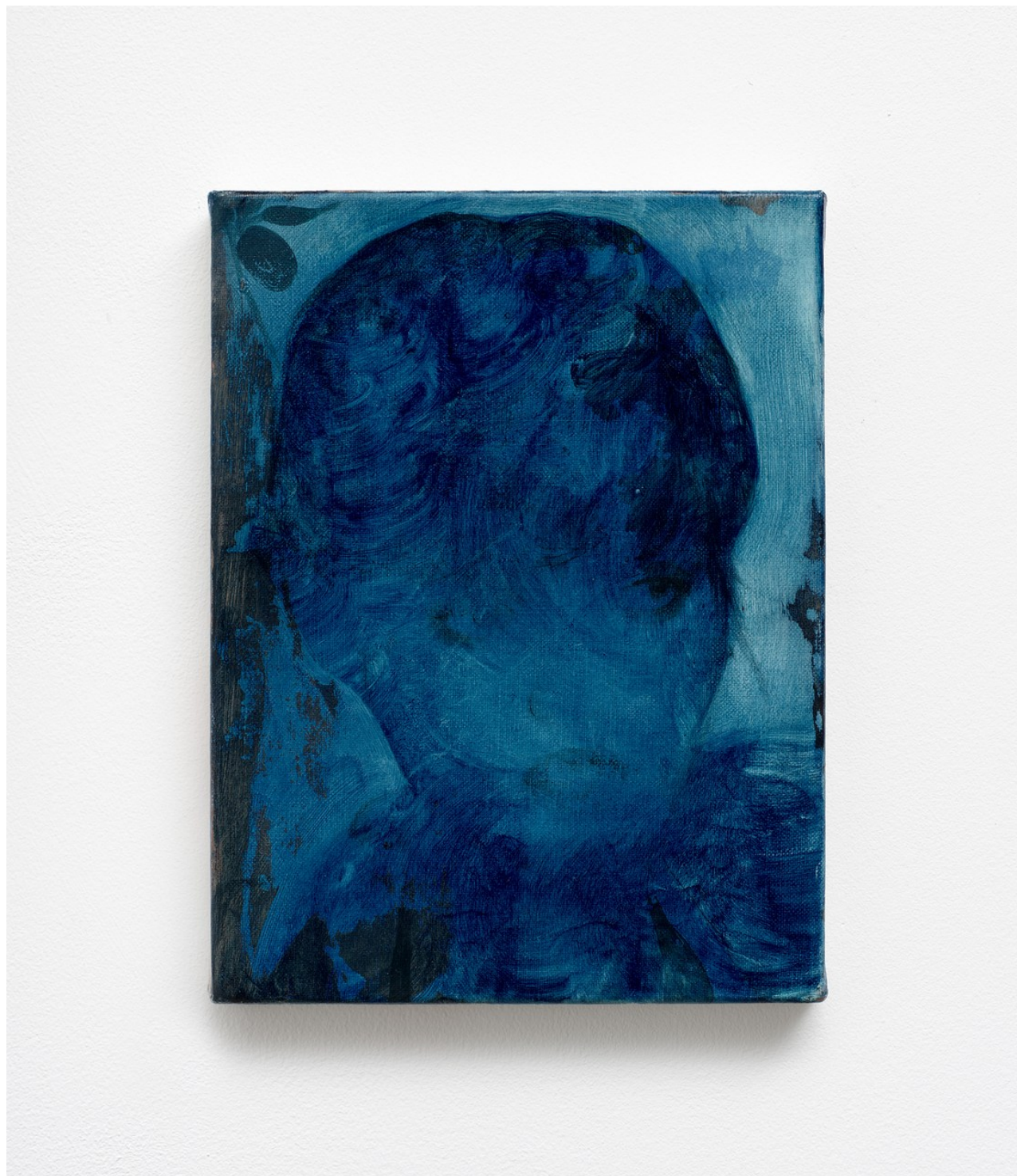
Two Children and a Chained Parrot, 2023

Oil on canvas

78 3/4 x 63 in (200 x 160 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
The Swimming Baths, 2023
Oil on linen
11 3/4 x 7 7/8 in (30 x 20 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
The Walled Garden, 2023
Oil on linen
11 3/4 x 7 7/8 in (30 x 20 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

The Waves at Biarritz, 2023

Oil, fabric pen and spray paint on linen

78 3/8 x 97 5/8 in (199 x 248 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Dusk, 2023

Oil and bleach on canvas

15 3/4 x 11 3/4 (40 x 30 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Dusk, 2023

Oil and bleach on canvas

15 3/4 x 11 3/4 (40 x 30 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
The Weavers, 2023
Oil on linen
78 3/4 x 63 in (200 x 160 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Disqualified, 2023

Oil on linen

39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in (100 x 80 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Little Bunny Blue, 2023
Oil and bleach on linen
19 3/4 x 13 3/4 in (50 x 35 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Little Bunny Blue, 2023
Oil and bleach on linen
19 3/4 x 13 3/4 in (50 x 35 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Under The Mistletoe, 2023

Oil on canvas

57 1/8 x 78 3/4 in (145 x 200 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

But It Was Not Snowing, 2023

Oil and bleach on canvas

39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in (100 x 80 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

But It Was Not Snowing, 2023

Oil and bleach on canvas

39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in (100 x 80 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Look Away, 2023
Oil on canvas
23 5/8 x 19 3/4 in (60 x 50 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Put In a Finger and Pull Out a Plum, 2023

Oil on linen

63 x 78 3/4 in (160 x 200 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Pop Up Toy, 2023
Oil on canvas
78 3/4 x 63 in (200 x 160 cm)

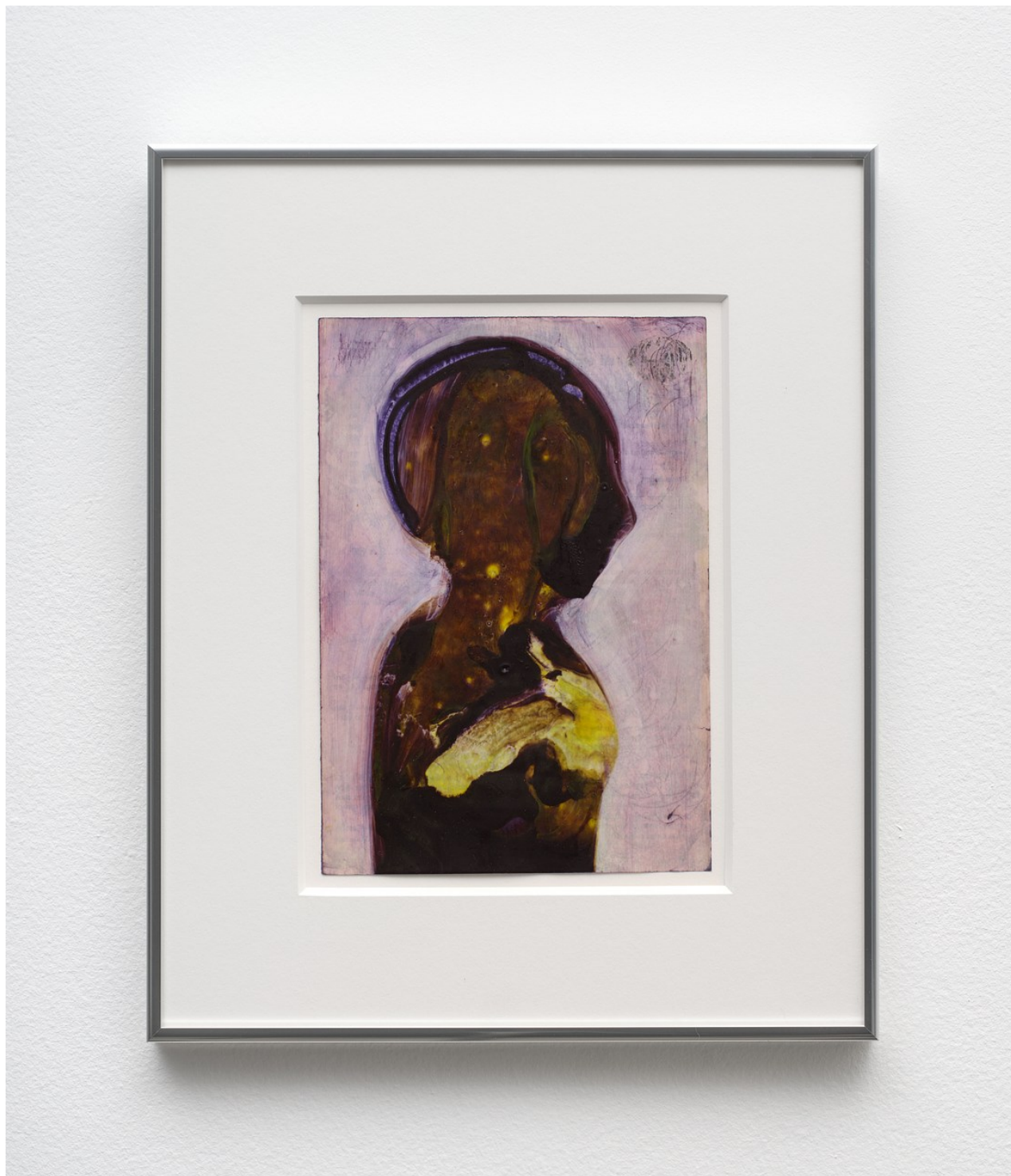


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Moths, 2023

Oil on canvas

78 3/4 x 57 1/8 in (200 x 145 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

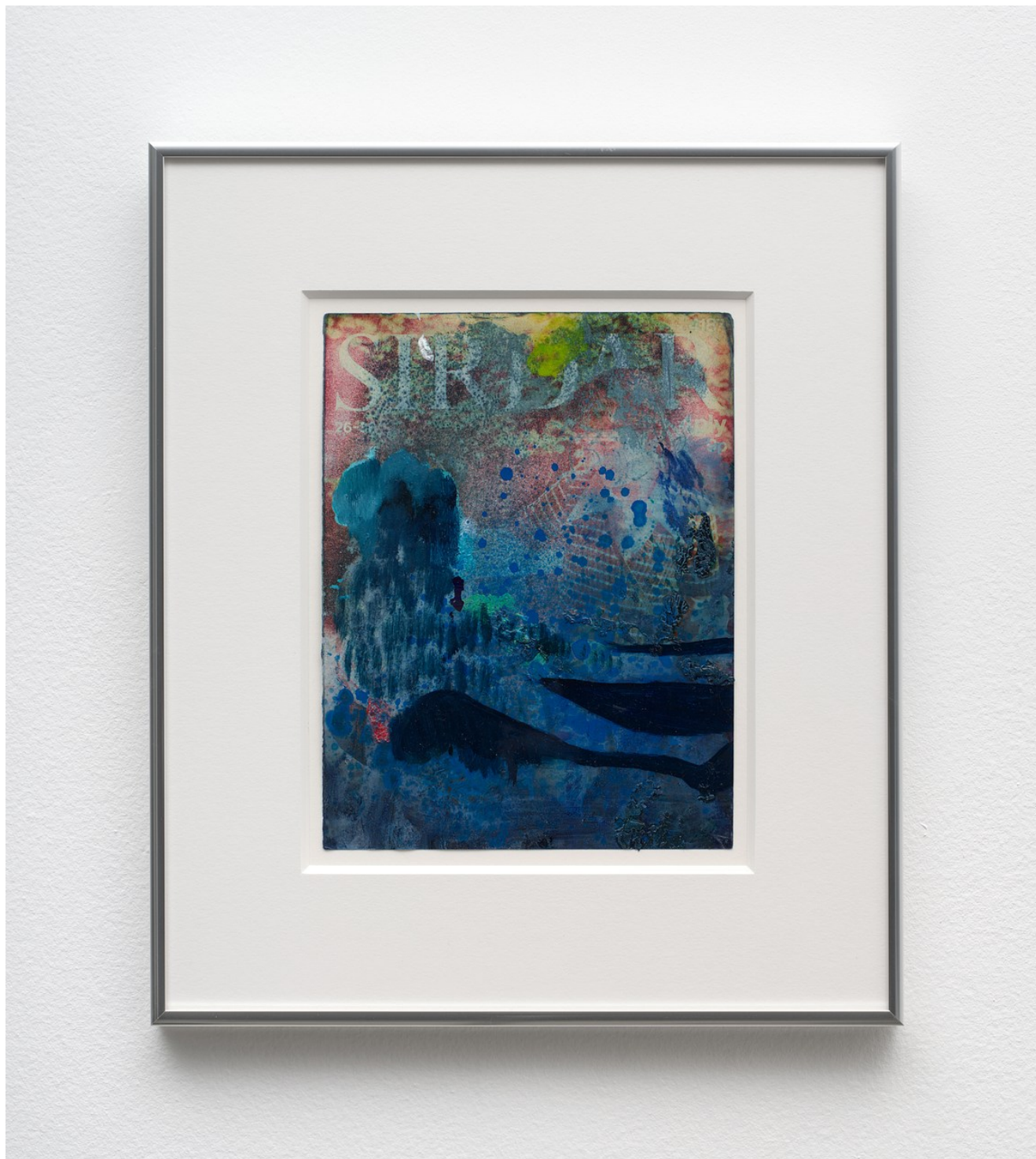
Locked In, 2023

Oil and wax on paper

9 5/8 x 6 3/4 in(24.5 x 17 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Silhouette Box, 2023
Oil and wax on paper
11 x 8 1/4 in (28 x 21 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Doctors and Nurses, 2023
Oil and spray paint on paper
9 1/4 x 7 1/8 in (23.5 x 18 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

Seeing Things In The Dark, 2023

Oil and wax on paper

9 1/2 x 7 1/8 in (24 x 18 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray

The Christmas Pudding, 2023

Oil, bleach, spray paint on linen

63 x 78 3/4 in (160 x 200 cm)



Alexis Soul-Gray
Chinese Whispers, 2023
Oil and bleach on canvas
19 3/4 x 23 5/8 in (50 x 60 cm)



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Under The Mistletoe, 2022-2023

Collage and oil on paper

8 5/8 x 11 1/4 in (22 x 28.5 cm)



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Put In a Finger and Pull Out a Plum, 2022-2023

Collage and oil on paper

8 7/8 x 11 in (22.5 x 28 cm)



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Extinct, The Christmas Pudding, 2022-2023

Collage and oil on paper

8 5/8 x 11 in (22 x 28 cm)