

# Bradley Ertaskiran

*Spiders and Snakes*  
Janet Werner  
March 21 to May 4, 2024

Bradley Ertaskiran is pleased to present *Spiders and Snakes*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Janet Werner. This body of work continues the artist's unique, hybrid explorations of portraiture, in which she creates her own game of bringing together competing representations of beauty and despair, humour and unease.

Werner's vibrant, spliced paintings often introduce disparate characters, locations, and intensities into the same image. In *Whitby*, two scenes collide: a figure caught mid-run converges with a poised, static body, a vivid landscape on one side and a sparse interior on the other. The union does not happen perfectly; the two sequences meet off-set center, like two opposing forces running into each other and then immediately sticking in place. The result is a collision that births a monumental, composite creature exuding an unnameable presence, more of a grand monolith than a conventional portrait.

*Helicopter* carries a similar tension in its opposing limbs and speeds, as two rotated pairs of legs unite on the canvas, one in a joyful handstand pose and the other rigid like a corpse. In this work, and many others, we turn our heads to the side, or even upside down, to match the orientation of the floating limbs, as if it would reveal the secret behind the artist's flip-flopping compositions. Werner seems to relish in mystifying the viewer, detaching her subjects from familiar popular culture contexts and staging them in foreign settings. In *Jockey*, Werner abruptly crops a woman's face at eye level and surrounds her in a glowing grey void, blinding her completely. Unsettling in its lack of context, the work champions bold formal strategies: detaching, cutting, and isolating the image on the canvas, to convey a deep sense of vulnerability and emptiness.

Collaging and folding image upon image, Werner adds spatial and psychological depth to the often simplistic portrayals of female bodies found in the works' photographic source material. *Feathers and Fold* carries all the satisfaction of a high-impact editorial; it is easy to get lost in the lush brushwork of the pink fur jacket, the sleek leather gloves, and the playful glimpses of bouncy curls only to be confounded by the strident corner fold that hides the subject's face. Instead of identifying markers, Werner paints the face with a single drooling streak, mirrored in the smudged linework on the canvas' edge, an imperfect tear or stain on an otherwise seamless image.

And yet despite the curious unease often elicited from Werner's masterful bifurcation of subjects and their worlds, playfulness is always the generator behind her works. *Bingo* is carnivalesque in its bizarre but animated composition; joyful props and a bright palette overshadow the peculiar rendering of the subject's untethered and mismatched torso. Werner has obscured the figure's body with an orange patch as if starting a new painting atop the old, with no attempt to align the features and create a new symmetrical whole. Here and in Werner's larger practice, something funny and ingenious is unfolding on the canvas, a slithery unknown.

Janet Werner (b. 1959, Winnipeg, Manitoba) lives and works in Montreal, Canada, and holds an MFA from Yale University (New Haven). Werner's work has been exhibited extensively across Canada, in the US and Europe. Notable exhibitions include the Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal), Almine Rech (Brussels), Kasmin Gallery (New York), Arsenal Contemporary Art (New York), Anat Ebgi (Los Angeles), the Art Gallery of Guelph (Guelph), and Whatiftheworld Gallery (Cape Town). A survey exhibition entitled *Another Perfect Day*, organized by the Kenderdine Art Gallery, was presented in five locations across Canada, including the Esker Foundation (Calgary). Werner's work is held in public collections that include the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Canadian Embassy in Berlin, University of Lethbridge (Alberta), the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Remai Modern (Saskatoon).

3550, rue Saint-Antoine Ouest  
Montréal (Québec) H4C 1A9  
+1 514 989-1056  
info@bradleyertaskiran.com