



ILY2 is thrilled to announce *Designing Women*, a presentation of new work by Melanie Flood and Matt Morris, on view May 25 - July 13, 2024.. Bringing together Flood's photography with paintings, a textile-based installation, and perfumery by Morris, the exhibition explores and critiques the question: *what is a woman?* As a title, *Designing Women* suggests a perpetual action. Here one uses their creative capacities to fashion a blueprint, to map a form, to iterate. Though the assertion that women can be designed establishes an aesthetic project and a subject position, it is unknown what actors are at play. Another question emerges: *Who is this designer of women?* ILY2 will host an Opening Reception for *Designing Women* on Saturday, May 25, 2024 from 4:00 - 6:00pm.

From their distinct vantages, Flood and Morris apprehend women as both producer and object of manufacture. Each artist addresses the felt particularities of femininity as it is performed and co-constructed across time, experience, and cultural norms. Diving headfirst into ornate hues and textures, *Designing Women* compels audiences to engage with aesthetics often relegated to the superficial and unserious (the womanly). Nude bodies, satin, bows, sequins—everyone's invited to the party.

Flood's photography practice has long been concerned with relentless auto-documentation. At the heart of this enterprise is a probing of the mythologized "ideal" female body. Her resolute, artistic eye coyly reveals the ridiculous standards women should be striving towards: *Brow, Lash Lip*, 2024 depicts an encounter between Flood and a poorly devised promotion for drugstore makeup. An aggressively stenciled eyebrow and false lashes hover over perfect pink lips. The consumerist cyclops seems perverse as it returns the viewer's gaze and reflects the vague semblance of Flood's head and smartphone.

In certain instances, Flood turns the camera on herself to show precarity, her body prone to violence. Physical and psychological vulnerability is laid bare in *Black eye (self-portrait)*, 2001/2024. Flood poses against a stark wall with a black eye made more severe by the camera's flash. The bruise glows in varying shades of pink, yellow, and purple. A peaceful expression and otherwise flawless skin distance the subject from the presupposed circumstances of the injury. It is intimate, no doubt, but not sentimental or affected. The striking impact of Flood's work lies in her ability to focus on herself without giving it all away.

If Flood interrogates womanhood's protean qualities through her own subjectivity, Morris' work operates from a position of eccentric plurality. His multifaceted practice deeply considers then reorients the repressive narrowness of conventional femininity by tracing its sensory and material features through various eras. In turn, Morris conjures identities and

instances of sociality that go otherwise unrepresented; queer life is historically -situated and -visible. The timeline collapsed, glamor is porous.

As an artist working in fragrance, Morris has made a perfume as an accompaniment to *Designing Women*. It is reminiscent of the "coming of age" perfumes found in early 1990s department stores, meant to be coquettish but unmistakably clean. In the context of the exhibition, the perfume contemplates how certain smells have been culturally demarcated for embellishment, others for hygiene—all to make women less disgusting (human) and more consumable.

Morris' new paintings are anchored by the dreamlike stylings of the 1930s and 1940s. Palettes are rosy and ashen and compositions hazy, as if seen across a smoke-filled room. The artist's aesthetic commitments coalesce perhaps most vividly in the largest painting on view, *The Women (Lee Miller. Dreaming of These, 1942 / Eileen Agar. by a harbour, 1934)*, 2024, a painted interpretation of a 1948 spread by American photographer Lee Miller in *British Vogue*, and a photograph by the British surrealist Eileen Agar. Period millinery and hand-sewn crystal appliqués materialize from the pictorial plane to emphasize the material tensions between the two mediums. Miller and Agar were contemporaries, and Morris brings their relationship into flirtatious proximity and mutual exchange.

Elsewhere, Morris has affixed textile bâtons from floor to ceiling. Made of stacked rows of gathered and sewn satin, these works are totem-like in orientation as their height creates emotional resonance. À la Deleuze, Morris approaches the fold as a recursive negotiation between the internal and external, doubling back upon itself in infinite arrangements. The satin is printed with referential material that is then folded repeatedly, comprising a live dossier of thought and surface.

Again we may ask: *What is a woman?* As Judith Butler elucidates in their 2024 book *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, feminists take indeterminability as a fundamental condition of the question, acknowledging from the outset that the meaning of the category is "unsettled, and even enigmatic." Rather than demystifying the woman as being, gender more broadly is taken as inherently shifting, deconstructive by nature. Beyond social movements or artistic milieus, this line of thought may be the grounding thesis of *Designing Women*. Womanhood moves, glinting in the sun like water.

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Melanie Flood is an artist and gallerist living in Queens, NY, and Portland, OR. She has presented recent solo shows at ILY2, Portland, OR; Ruschwoman, Chicago, IL; Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR; and Ditch Projects, Springfield, OR. In 2024, Flood's work will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR. An arts professional for over twenty years, Flood previously served as Director of the Paige Powell Archive and oversaw a significant photographic collaboration between Powell and Gucci. Flood's work and projects have been featured in *Art in America*, the *New York Times*, and *New York Magazine*, among others. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, such as the Regional Arts and Cultural Council Grant, Precipice Fund Award, Oregon Arts Commission Artist Fellowship, and two Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Exhibition Grants. As of 2024, her work belongs in the permanent collection of the Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR. Flood teaches in the Schnitzer School of Art + Art History + Design at Portland State University and holds a BFA in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York and an MFA in Contemporary Art Practice from Portland State University.

Matt Morris is an artist, perfumer, and writer based in Chicago. Morris has presented artwork internationally at Andrew Kreps, Margot Samel, and Tiger Strikes Asteroid, New York; Musée de la Fraïse and Ruschman, Berlin, Germany; Netwerk Aalst, Aalst, Belgium; Krabbesholm Højskole, Skive, Denmark; / Slash, San Francisco, CA; DePaul Art Museum and Queer Thoughts, Chicago, IL; Mary + Leigh Block Museum of Art, Evanston, IL; Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, IL; and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH. Morris has contributed to *Artforum*, *Art Papers*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, *Fragrantica*, *Sculpture*, *The Seen*, and *X-TRA*—additional writing appears in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. Chapters of Morris' writing are included in the anthologies *Olfactory Art and the Political in an Age of Resistance*, Routledge; and *Atem / Breath*, De Gruyter, with Dr. Dorothee King. Morris is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies. In 2017 Morris earned a Certification in Fairyology from Doreen Virtue, PhD. Morris is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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