

# Nina Johnson

## Tara Walters *Heartbreaker, Dream Maker*

March 20th–May 17th, 2025



Tara Walters in her studio.

### Tara Walters: *Heartbreaker, Dream Maker*

Front Gallery

March 20th–May 17th, 2025

**Opening Reception: Thursday, March 20th 6–8 PM**

The American imagination thrives on a relentless optimism—a refusal to yield, even in the face of profound loss. In *Heartbreaker, Dream Maker*, Tara Walters channels this spirit, creating a body of work that explores the fragile dance between joy and sorrow, light and dark, surrender and resistance. These works, completed before the California wildfires swept through Malibu and destroyed her home, stand as both a celebration of life's dualities and a meditation on resilience.

At the heart of this exhibition are 10 new paintings and two pastel drawings, born of Pacific Ocean water and layered with water-based and oil-based paints. The materials themselves reflect the tension between fluidity and permanence, an apt metaphor for the themes Walters explores: optimism versus pessimism, confrontation versus play. Her images of dancing jellyfish, flaming tigers in the trees, and doves crying over the canyons of Malibu evoke a verdant world teetering on the brink.

The poignancy of these works deepens when placed against the backdrop of California's recent wildfires. Walters painted these scenes before the skies darkened with ash, before bird-like planes began their sweeping arcs across the Pacific, scooping water to battle flames climbing the parched hillsides. The surreal beauty of her landscapes feels sharpened by this juxtaposition, capturing a fleeting, fragile moment of verdant life that seems both eternal and on the verge of slipping into dreamland.

Walters expands upon her storytelling in the paintings with poetry. Each painting is accompanied by a poem. Like Florine Stettheimer's *Crystal Flowers*, a companion during Walters' creative process, these texts embed themselves in the metronome of self-reflection and the complex interplay of beauty and danger.

The final piece of the show is a video piece conceived during her time in Lacoste, France. In this surreal projection, a mirrored ballerina dances on a moonscape to the haunting sound of Walters' own voice and guitar, adding another layer to her meditation on identity and duality.

The exhibition title itself draws from two songs with the same lyric—Audrey Hepburn's tender *Moon River* and Pat Benatar's defiant *Heartbreaker*. Both embody strength but from opposing angles, prompting the question: Is power found in soft surrender or

fierce resistance? This new body of work reflects a maturity and groundedness—a step away from the ethereal realms—peopled with unicorns—that Walters has been known to explore. In this body of work, Walters renews her interest in capturing the magical realism of the everyday. In this way, Walters draws inspiration from artists like Stettheimer, Marie Laurencin, Ree Morton and Laura Owens, engaging the world with a down-to-earth wonder.

Tara Walters: *Heartbreaker, Dream Maker* is on view in the Front Gallery through May 17th, 2025.

### ABOUT TARA WALTERS

Tara Walters (b. 1990, Washington D.C.) holds an MFA from ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena and a BFA from Savannah College of Art and Design. Her work has been exhibited in Los Angeles, New York, Shanghai, and Venice, and is recognized for its delicate balance of surrealism and emotional resonance.

### ABOUT NINA JOHNSON

Nina Johnson is a contemporary art gallery committed to elevating exceptional artists and their work. Founded by Nina Johnson in 2007, the gallery is both a pillar of Miami's contemporary art community and an internationally recognized voice known for its wide-ranging and intuitive program. In the spring of 2024 Johnson was welcomed as a member of the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA).

Nina Johnson's mission is to champion extraordinary artists' work while forming long-term partnerships through deep, intentional connections. The gallery's approach is artist-driven, rooted in an appreciation for historical context and the physical practice of making and exhibiting artwork. Nina Johnson has produced renowned exhibitions by a broad range of artists from around the world, including Germane Barnes, Judy Chicago, Patrick Dean Hubbell, Francesca DiMattio, Rochelle Feinstein, Minjae Kim, Emmett Moore, Eamon Ore-Giron, Woody De Othello, and Katie Stout

Nina Johnson is located in a four-building compound in Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood and features a traditional exhibition space and ancillary gallery spaces in a two-story converted residence in the backyard.