

Fiona Mackay
40's
JUN 12 – JUL 24, 2026

Turning 40 often inaugurates a time of reckoning and reassessment. Existential questions may arise for the first time or return with growing force. Goals and desires may have been achieved, deferred, abandoned, or simply paused. Not yet old, but no longer that young, attention turns to understanding what energy remains, what has changed, and what can be revitalized. A two-part exhibition by Fiona Mackay, *40's* presents two bodies of work ranging from painting to various printmaking and coloration techniques. The first part, *Roses*, focuses on the male body, examining not only its erotic charge but also its role as a site of vanity, rivalry, and social performance, while the second, *40's* presents a series shaped by the unstable life stage of the early forties—a condition heavily informed by popular culture, clichés, and social expectations.

40's deepens Mackay's long standing engagement with longing, femininity, and desire, which her work embodies in the form of continual oscillation. Across both series, desire is a recurring focus, which is addressed as a permanent state, an all-encompassing dimension that does not need to be overcome but rather inhabited and filled with life. *40's* opens onto this complex horizon through drift and instability, swinging between figuration and abstraction, urgency and hesitation, assertion and withdrawal. These poles are neither a metaphor nor a mere decorative motif. Rather than illustrating them, Mackay approaches them almost structurally, prying open liminal spaces in which viewers are invited to immerse in something that never fully reveals itself.

As one of the defining painters of her generation, Fiona Mackay has emerged as a vital voice in contemporary art through her unflinching and deeply perceptive investigations of lust and female desire while embracing or distorting notions of cliché and bad taste. The works in *40's* stand in conscious dialogue with a long tradition of painters who have brought desire, the body, and emotional interiority into the foreground of their practice. This is exactly Mackay's itinerary—she explores what it means to desire as a woman in a world that has historically managed, instrumentalized, or romanticized female desire, although she does not seek to counter this legacy with alternative concepts. Instead, her painting subverts stereotypes and projections by treating desire simply as what it is: a genuine, complete, and sovereign inner experience—complex, contradictory, vulnerable, and at times unabashedly trashy.

Overall, Mackay's painting is an ongoing negotiation between personal perception and emotional experience as they move toward more abstract, typological, and universal dimensions of the human condition. Her gaze encompasses a wide range of dreamlike, mnemonical (or fantasizing) landscapes to the recent, almost narrative scenes drawn from observations of urban life. Throughout, her work oscillates between ironic distance and absolute directness. The clear act of printing is counterbalanced by the oneiric lines of her compositions. Colour is not used to describe but rather to evoke. Form remains fluid.

Ultimately, what distinguishes Mackay's painting is that this oscillation – above all between figuration and abstraction – often takes the form of diffusion. The blur that coats her compositions is key. This dissolved physicality and the apparent looseness of her compositions are deliberate conceptual choices: blurring is not a veil but a form of exposure. Longing cannot be brought fully into focus; it exists in the space between grasping and letting go, between appearing and receding. It is through this gesture that a form of courage emerges, one that extends beyond the individual toward a collective experience of vulnerability and longing.

Fiona Mackay (1984, Aberdeen, Scotland) lives and works between Antwerp, Belgium and Marseille, France.