

MAXIMILLIAN WILLIAM

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SOMAYA CRITCHLOW AFTERNOON'S DARKNESS

Opening Reception: Thursday 6 October, 6 – 8pm
Exhibition Dates: 6 October – 14 December 2022

I observed the cracks of Peckham Rye's yellowing grounds fill with rainwater. The outstretched grass edges deluged with muddy pools that swallow up nature's debris. Shadow play across the light of the earth, my world contained in English indirect light, that warms and darkens the entry into harvest.

Maximillian William, London is pleased to present *Afternoon's Darkness*, an exhibition of new paintings and drawings by British artist Somaya Critchlow (b. London, 1993).

Drawing on inspiration from a diverse array of resources such as the rape-revenge anime *Belladonna of Sadness*, the paintings of Edvard Munch, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, and Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* prints and his studies of the Duchess of Alba, *Afternoon's Darkness* draws on these chosen recourses to build its own imagery of horror and resurrection, of exclusion and creation.

Through this exhibition Critchlow continues her exploration of the female figure at the centre of painting in navigating perception, history and the complexity of image-making. The works in the show represent a shift, scaled up to what Critchlow would refer to as 'larger mid-scale' paintings, conceived at a time of isolation and reflection in a small seaside town through spring.

One painting in the show references *The Maids* by Jean Genet, which plays upon the house servant and the master-slave dichotomy. The maids are subjugated to tedious and repetitive labour that causes a hatred for their dominant mistress; within their loathing there is also hidden a fantasy for this same dichotomy of subjugation. Critchlow often presents the viewer with imagery that is burdened by its own existence, simultaneously offering up self-contained alternatives for power structures or even the possibility of 'no good' – just as the maids who, unable to eradicate the position they fulfil, enact the murder of their mistress.

In Critchlow's work imagery and ideas are reproduced and reframed from a personal narrative, intimating inner thoughts, and leaving the viewer on precarious grounds.

Her work is often perceived as a commentary on sexuality, sex positivity and in turn empowerment, to a fault. It seems there is a need to position her work as actively 'good' or 'positive' instead of as an offering of autonomy. For what does it mean to be 'good' or 'positive' when it comes to depictions of the female figure?

Notes to the editor

Somaya Critchlow (b. 1993, London) lives and works in London. She obtained her BA in Fine Art Painting at the University of Brighton in 2016 before joining The Royal Drawing School, London, where she completed a Postgraduate Diploma in 2017. Previous solo exhibitions include *Blow-Up*, Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zürich (2021), *Underneath a Bebop Moon*, Maximillian William, London (2020) and *Sincere for Synonym* at Fortnight Institute, New York (2019). In November 2022, Critchlow will be curating and participating in a group exhibition at the Lightbox Gallery, Woking with artists including Lucian Freud, Frank Bowling and Keith Critchlow. Recent group exhibitions include *The Story of Art as it's Still Being Written*, Victoria Miro, London (2022); *Women Painting Women*, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2022); *Drawing Attention: Emerging British Artists*, British Museum, London (2022); *Fire Figure Fantasy*, ICA Miami, Florida (2022); *The Soul as Sphere*, Maximillian William, London (2022); *Get Lifted!*, curated by Hilton Als, Karma, New York (2021) and *Mixing it Up: Painting Today*, Hayward Gallery, London (2021). Critchlow's work is featured in public collections including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; LACMA, Los Angeles; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; RISD Museum, Providence; ICA Miami, Florida; the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, Norwich and the Arts Council Collection, London.

Maximillian William began with an itinerant model which allowed the gallery to gradually form a roster of contemporary artists. An impulse to expand alongside the advancing careers of these artists led to the establishment of a permanent gallery space in Fitzrovia in 2019. The gallery is artist-centric, collaborating closely with those it supports to build their platforms. On occasion, the gallery seeks to produce exhibitions that highlight those who have influenced its creative community, with the aim of presenting pivotal figures to a new generation. Alongside exhibition making, the gallery is committed to publishing, producing a range of publications from artist books to exhibition catalogues and monographs. The distribution of literature is key to the gallery's commitment to improving accessibility to contemporary art. Publications by the gallery are held in the archives of MoMA and Tate.