

Tickle Torture:

Preview: Thursday 9th March 6.00 – 8.00pm
Exhibition Dates: 10th March – 15th April 2017

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L O N D O N

Beers London is excited to present *Tickle Torture*, an exhibition that brings together three contemporary female painters: led by Bosnia-Herzegovinan born Maja Ruznic; along with a selection of modestly-sized work by American Kristy Luck; supported by British artist Holly Mills who will exhibit a selection of work on paper. The exhibition, originally conceived as a solo exhibition for the now LA-based Ruznic, eventually evolved to include the works of both Luck and Mills, with the exhibition's directives and scope changing as a result to incorporate larger questions about the presence of females in art and art-history. *Tickle Torture*, titled after one of Ruznic's works, presents work that is simultaneously gentle and violent, posing a question about how the works should be viewed.

Historically, the work of female artists has been marginalised and often overlooked. When viewing this exhibition, it seems relevant to consider the work of those artists that have overcome and responded to the specific set of challenges faced by women. The work of iconic artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Carolee Schneeman, whose work reclaims the female form both as canvas and subject. Artists whose negotiations in mark-making range from the subtleties of Agnes Martin or Vija Celmins, to more direct approaches like contemporary painters Cecily Brown or Dana Schutz. From the poetic, dreamlike early works of Laura Owens, to the surrealist inspired work of Lisa Yuskavage or the visceral nature of Marlene Dumas. Does gender become relevant to reading these works, and is female experience inherently present in the artwork?

However, aside from these undeniably larger questions, each Ruznic, Luck, and Mills exhibit an undeniably keen sensibility and intuitive approach to mark-making. By mentally transferring the act of tickling from an action performed by fingers on the body to one performed by a brush or pencil upon a surface, the viewer is invited to consider how the connotations of this action reflect upon each artist shown here, their personal histories, and the fictitious ones developed on the painterly surface. To be tickled is something pleasurable yet unbearable; something which may induce laughter whilst providing an unendurable sensation. Both tickling and torturing are physical acts upon a body that provoke a reaction just as painting and drawing are physical acts upon a surface that provoke the viewer to think. As such, we are led to consider how the process of art-making may be an act of pleasurable torture for Ruznic, Luck, or Mills? Artists often talk about 'stabbing' the canvas. Art making is simultaneously a constructive and a destructive process, (just think of Bacon discussing revelations in the studio that arose from his attempts to destroy various works). Artists often talk about the notion of 'obsession' and 'compulsion' when creating, or how their highest derivation of pleasure comes from the *confines* of their studios: a prison of undeniable passion. Does each artist 'tickle' the surface through light, barely tactile strokes, or is their process a more laborious, tortured endeavour? The phrase denotes an action whereby something pleasurable is undermined by something negative, and in a similar way each of the works on show hint at a world hidden beneath the surface.

Maja Ruznic, who previously worked exclusively with water-based mediums and has recently made a exploration into oil painting with her latest body of work, 'Soil as Witness', allows the paint to bleed and run of its own accord. By concentrating on colour rather than line, her works become abstract landscapes from which the viewer's innate pareidolia discerns figures and faces. Kristy Luck is similar to Ruznic in that her seemingly abstract canvasses evoke a primordial recognition of biological symbolism. Blurred bodies of colour hide natural shapes: bodies, shells, eyes, petals. Her chosen medium of oil and wax on canvas allow her mark-making to become fluid and instant which, in turn, gives life to the fantastical imagined creatures that surface in each piece. Holly Mills similarly allows her chosen medium – be it acrylic, oil or ink – to enact itself within the confines of her original vision. Her works are very much based around the exploration of how this process can define itself, and how she can act symbiotically with paint. Mills' works, particularly those on paper, seem more decisive than Ruznic's or Luck's, which seem to flow between amorphous and languid figures, perhaps more content to relinquish a degree of their ownership over the final work to paint itself. Together, they raise interesting questions about female authorship in contemporary art-making, as well as a related yet distinct relationship between the three artists.

Maja Ruznic (b. 1983, Bosnia & Herzegovina) lives and works in Los Angeles, California. She graduated with a BFA from the University of California, Berkeley in 2005 and an MFA from the California College of Arts, San Francisco in 2009. Solo exhibitions include; 'The Wailing Sisters', CES Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016; 'Soil as Witness', Jack Fischer Gallery, San Francisco, 2016; and 'Untitled', Candyland, Stockholm, Sweden. Two person exhibitions include; 'The Boogeyman is Here' with Luz Maria Sanchez, She Works Flexible, Houston Texas, 2015; and 'Lonely Hunters' with Raneé Henderson, Eastside International, Los Angeles, 2015. Group exhibitions include; 'By the River', ACME, Los Angeles, 2017; 'With Liberty and Justice for Some', Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles, 2017; 'Phantom Limb', Shulamit Nazarian Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016; and 'Angels With Dirty Faces', Galerie Ernst Hilger, Vienna, Austria, 2015.

Kristy Luck (b. 1985, Los Angeles, California) lives and works in LA. She graduated in 2010 with a BFA in Printmaking from Rockford University, Rockford, and in 2014 with a MFA in Painting from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has had a solo exhibition with Eastside International (ESXLA), Los Angeles, California. Group exhibitions include; 'Ocotillo', Stella Elkins Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, 2017; 'Women on the Fence', Mothership, Desert Hot Springs, CA, 2016; 'Velvet Ropes', GIFC Worldwide, Brooklyn, NY, 2016; and 'Got it for Cheap', a show rotating between Copenhagen, Stockholm, Paris and London, curated by Charlie Roberts, 2016. She has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago between 2013 and 2016.

Holly Mills (b. 1990, London, UK) lives and works in London. She graduated from Camberwell College of Arts with a BA in Illustration in 2012, the same year she won the V&A student illustrator of the year award. Selected exhibitions include; 'The Jungle Book Club', Book Club, London, 2015; 'Secret 7"' and 'Pick Me Up', Somerset House, London, 2015; 'Cluster Puck', Print Space, London; and 'V&A Illustration Awards', Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2012.