

Now Representing: Clare Rojas



Freedom Upon Re-Birth, 2020, oil on linen, 40 x 50 inches.

Jessica Silverman is delighted to announce representation of Clare Rojas, the California artist best known for her magic realist and otherworldly abstract paintings. Scheduled for December, a solo exhibition of recent work by Rojas will inaugurate Jessica Silverman's new gallery space on Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Rojas grew up in a house full of Peruvian folk art, textiles and furniture, brought to the mid-West by her father, a scholarship student. "Inside our house was basically like being in Peru," explains Rojas. "Once you stepped outside, you were in Ohio. That might explain my obsession with thresholds into other realms."

Travel for the working-class family consisted of journeys to see kin in Piura, the third oldest Spanish town in South America. There Rojas spent time with her superstitious grandmother, an oil painter, whose belief system included the attribution of good luck, bad omens and superpowers to everything from body hair and birds to the state of the sun and moon.

Rojas's white American mother taught children with learning disabilities in inner city Columbus. As part of her work, she amassed a huge number of illustrated children's books, which Rojas studied for hours on end, examining their line, color, shape and composition as well as their rhymes and narratives. A connoisseur of the medium, Rojas has, on two occasions, forsaken museum catalogues in favor of creating children's books.

Music was central to the Rojas household. The artist, her father and brothers all play guitar while her mother is an accomplished pianist. To this day, Rojas maintains a music practice as Peggy Honeywell. A parody of femininity, this alter-ego was named for pop-jazz singer Peggy Lee and a brand of indoor space heater. "Music is a form of story-telling," says Rojas, "and a form of research and development for my visual work."

Indeed, Rojas's paintings appear to have melody and harmony. They are lyrical precisely because they rarely use text.

Somewhat by accident, Rojas ended up studying printmaking at Rhode Island School of Art and Design. "Printmaking forces you to plot and plan the outcome in advance," explains Rojas. "It is a real discipline that I relish to this day." Although she began her career making miniatures, Rojas has become a master of scale, creating compositions with real wall power that compel from a distance, but also offer meaningful intricacies when viewed up close.

"Rojas" is the feminine plural of "rojo," which means red in Spanish. True to her surname, Rojas is an avid colorist. She loves mixing paint and experimenting with hues. "I'm honestly obsessed with color, but it's not something I can talk about," says Rojas. "I feel like I have an animal intelligence for color, like when a dog intuits that an earthquake is coming." She is also a thoughtful eco-feminist, whose landscapes are populated by black-haired goddesses or wise women, who tap into the sublime power of nature, often calming it and sometimes stirring it up.

Rojas's forthcoming exhibition reveals her formal and spiritual evolution in oil, acrylic, gouache and watercolor paint. This new body of work started with depictions of hag stones, a.k.a. rocks that have acquired a natural hole through water erosion, which are deemed sacred and worn as protective amulets. Then moved on to all-knowing owls, abstracted crows and swans, four-leafed clovers, tulips, rabbits, snakes, and squiggly spiders' webs.



Harnessing the Energy Light (detail), 2020, oil on linen, 12 x 9 inches.

Defying art historical pigeonholes, Rojas's work is difficult to sum up. She has developed her own form of pan-American high-folk figurative abstraction. We could say that it's Grandma Moses meets Juan Miro via Leonora Carrington.

Clare Rojas (b. 1976, Columbus, OH) has a BFA in printmaking from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in painting from School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Rojas's work is in the permanent collections of MOMA New York, NY; SFMOMA, CA; Dakis Jannou Collection, Athens, Greece; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain; Progressive Art Collection, Cleveland, OH; San Jose Museum of Art, CA; Berkeley Art Museum, CA; and the Smart Museum, University of Chicago, IL. She has had many solo shows in public institutions, including: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; IKON Gallery, Birmingham, England; Museum Het Domein, Netherlands; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, MA; Savannah College of Art and Design, GA; Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS; Knoxville Museum of Art, TN; Belkin Satellite, Vancouver, BC; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA. Rojas has won awards from Artadia, Eureka Fellowship, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and the Headlands Center for the Arts.

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