

# 48hills

"Review: Clare Rojas' cosmologies of uncanny animal intelligence and mystery"

By Genevieve Quick

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Clare Rojas, 'Here We Go,' 2021

In a soft launch of her gorgeous new Chinatown space, Jessica Silverman presents a solo show by Bay Area artist Clare Rojas. With individual paintings displaying a dramatic range of graphic shapes and painterly rendering, Rojas' exhibition "Here We Go" (through May 22) may at first glance appear rather disjointed. However, deeper inspection reveals how Rojas' series of vignettes construct a cosmology in which birds and women balance the natural world and dark, mystical energies.

With paintings featuring corvids (a classification of birds that includes crows, ravens, jays, and magpies), Rojas explores an uncanny animal intelligence that is both respected and ominous. In Aesop's Fables, Edgar Allen Poe's works, and many folk traditions, corvids are represented in parables that caution against hubris, or as omens of the supernatural.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

In the painting "Here We Go" (2020), two sets of heads and tails suggest intertwined corvids. A primary red shape in the center alludes to a primal energy or cavity, from which a smaller covid emerges in flight. On the left side of the canvas, an additional corvid drapes its wings over a blue circle as if sheltering or brooding it. Rojas' graphic abstraction allows for scale shifts, such that the blue circle evokes a blueberry, egg, moon, or the Earth. Rojas alludes to a creation story, where birds are protectors and creators, possibly on a cosmic level.



Clare Rojas, 'Black Bird, White Owl,' 2020

In her graphic works, Rojas' elegant and overlapping lines and shapes metaphorically and formally establish a sense of balance. In "Black Bird, White Owl" (2020), flowers are balanced in the beak of an owl, a symbol of wisdom. Additionally, the work features a sensuous black curvilinear form, where its positive and negative shapes reference a corvid's wings or tails. In contrasting black and white forms, Rojas positions owls and corvids, such that intelligence is balanced between wisdom and cunningness.

Rojas also pursues a more painterly and surrealist vein in a series of figurative works. Like the Latin American magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, these works explore surrealist origin stories, compassion, and trauma.

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Clare Rojas, 'Ominous Nature of Fog,' 2020

In "Ominous Nature of Fog" (2020), three female figures dressed in druid-like cloaks appear to be beckoning the fog to quench the arid land and small fires on the left of the canvas. While locally the work may conjure memories of last year's blazing red sky and the all-too-frequent Northern California wild fires, it more generally operates as a parable about our stewardship of the environment and the balance of forces, where women are dark and mystical facilitators.

As folklore richly constructs cosmologies that layer the human, animal, natural, and cosmic worlds, they impart meaning and balance in the unknowable. With Rojas' expansive vocabulary of styles, she presents multiples levels of reality and symbology, where in particular positive and negative shape is expertly employed as formal graphic elements and metaphorical allusions to balance and absence. While there is no singular path between Rojas' worlds, the artist invites viewers to cross between them throughout the whole exhibition.

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