

# Los Angeles

MAGAZINE

"Artist Clare Rojas' Magical Surrealism Lands In LA"

By Michael Slenske

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Exterior of Jessica Silverman's LA Pop-Up space. Courtesy of Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.  
Photo credit: Dawn Blackman.

**Jessica Silverman has taken over a South Robertson white box for a pop-up of the Mission School artist's latest works**

When Clare Rojas traveled back to Columbus, Ohio in February after her father died, her mother, "the memory keeper," was looking through some old photos for the funeral. Eventually, she came upon a suite of her daughter's childhood drawings.

"She said, 'take whatever you want.' And what I noticed was that up through 3rd grade, I always wrote 'two years old' or 'seven years old.' I could place that in time and space because I know what I was doing at seven as opposed to like, 1981. Ages trigger way more than years—unless something super traumatic takes place, like 9/11," Rojas said.

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The artist spoke with LAMag inside a white box gallery on South Robertson. Jessica Silverman Gallery, her San Francisco-based dealer, had taken over the space for a Los Angeles pop-up of Rojas's most recent paintings.

"I thought that was really cool to put myself back in that space, when I was obsessed with ants and face down in the grass and whatnot. So I thought why not do that again...now."

As she walked around a selection of a few dozen paintings from this calendar year—from flat surrealist tableaux to meatier geometric abstractions and magical landscapes—Rojas points out the "45 years" tagged next to the signature and date in most of the paintings.

"These works are so referential to my life and experiences. They're for me first, so why not put the age? I've lived 45 years, that's a long time, and it's about me and what I'm challenged by and succeeding at, at 45, not about something that goes into the ether and I never see it again," Rojas explained,

She uses these notations as Proustian madeleines for this singularly diaristic moment in her life (and that of the world). Gesturing toward one of a few paintings of birds, she adds, "Jessica asked me when this bird painting was made and it could have been made yesterday or 10 years ago. I don't know, I have no idea. Memory is a weird thing. My dad just died of Alzheimer's and that made me think of how he's jumping between time and space and it's an incredible concept how your brain can just go back to when you were 18."

Since Rojas broke out as a star of the Mission School movement in San Francisco—alongside Alicia McCarthy, Barry McGee, Chris Johanson and Ruby Neri—she has assembled a vibrant multimedia practice that includes sculpture, paintings, and even children's books. Often, her work will complicate issues of time and space. These are abstract pieces that incorporate the geometries of quilts and architecture; they're folk-inspired and often darkly comical narrative paintings that merge problematic humans with mysterious landscapes.

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Clare Rojas, *She Believed in the Magic of it All*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.  
Photo: Phillip Maisel

The titular painting (and the largest) of the exhibition, *She Believes in the Magic of it All* (2022), is a heavily impastoed country scene that is filled with witches soaring through the air and hiding in the trees.

"For me, it's a great starting point because it feels like the landscape where Clare lives," says Silverman.

Rojas adds that she's a "total isolationist. I like my solitude. There's a continuous theme in my work that we live in other realms consciously or unconsciously and we need to find a balance."

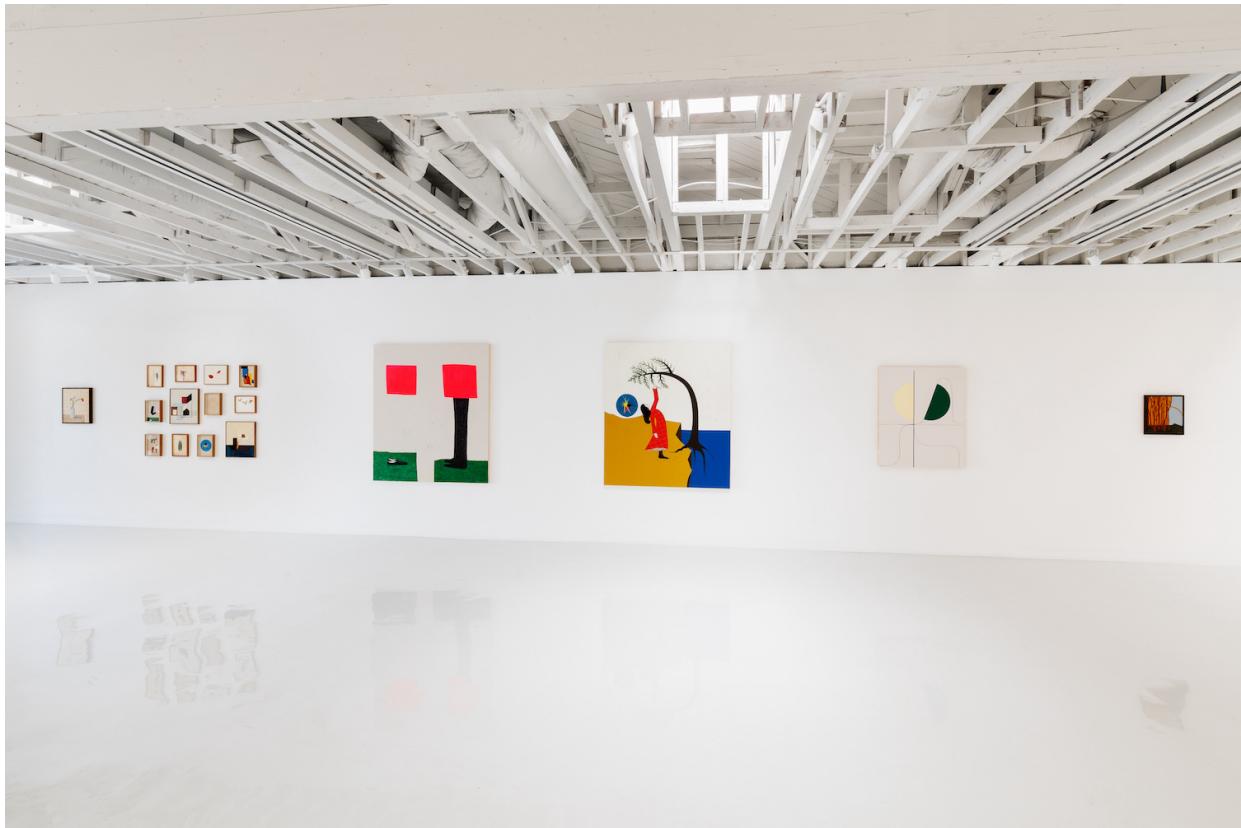
In this gallery, Rojas balances the occult vibrations of that painting with abstractions of faceted, gem-like portals where manicured hands and birds are emerging from (or entering into) some other dimensions. Directly across the wall from the witches is a small canvas, *Emerging from Darkness to Find Herself* (2022), showing a woman trapped in a black void and peering out toward a pink screen-like geometry.

"This piece is about reaching out to this other space of hope, needing something other than where we're at," Rojas says, noting a similar divide of two worlds in a small painting of a rainbow

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breaking apart as it shines through a corpse of redwoods; a pair of black lace-ups rest on the hill just outside the forest. As Rojas notes, "you don't wear your shoes in my church."



Installation view of *She Believed in the Magic of it All*, 2022. Jessica Silverman Pop-Up, Los Angeles.  
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo: Dawn Blackman

Next to this house of worship is a large acrylic painting on a panel *Hanging On* (2022), depicting a long-haired woman with a tear in her eye. She's pulling on a tree, which is about to fall off a cliff.

"There's this beauty and this loss, yet the tree is holding on, it's that balance of tranquility and chaos," says Rojas, turning around to a surrealist seascape titled, *I'll Always Have this Little Movie in My Head* (2022). It portrays a woman's head in the form of the ocean backgrounding a man on a cliff, who peers out toward the horizon as his dog almost chases a deer-like creature off the ledge into the deep blue; the dog is severing the head of a female bystander with his leash in the process. A couple on a bench scowl at one another, oblivious to all this tranquil chaos.

"It's about the patriarchy in general. He's blissfully unaware because he's enjoying his life. The ground is meeting him where he's at, the king of it all," says Rojas. "It's also about how one person can have one experience and another a completely different experience within the exact same environment."

A poetic summation of 2022—or 45 years in Rojas time.

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