

Susan Eley
Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Saints and Sisters

New Work by Malcolm Moran and Deirdre O'Connell

September 14 – October 26, 2020



Opening Reception: Monday, September 14, 6-8pm

Susan Eley Fine Art is delighted to announce “Saints and Sisters”, a two-person exhibition opening on September 14, featuring paintings by Connecticut-based artist Malcolm Moran and New Yorker Deirdre O’Connell. The exhibition opens with an Artists’ Reception on Monday, September 14, 6-8pm and closes on October 26, 2020. “Saints and Sisters” is Moran’s first exhibition with SEFA and O’Connell’s fourth exhibition with the gallery.

While applying vastly different practices—Moran produces printed monotypes and O’Connell creates intricate, mixed media paintings on panel—the two artists share an impetus to navigate and reflect a chaotic and complex world through portraits of powerful and courageous figures, part fictional and part real. The pairing of O’Connell and Moran was therefore a natural curatorial outcome.

DEIRDRE O’CONNELL

Deirdre O’Connell is a self-taught painter and an Obie-award winning actress, known for her formidable performances on stage, television and film. Most recently, O’Connell starred in *Dana H* at the Vineyard Theater--which garnered rave reviews and was in an extended run prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. O’Connell took some time between rehearsals several months ago to share her newest paintings in her East Village studio.

As I entered the brightly lit, underground studio, I was greeted by 18 paintings of women on narrow wooden panels, each under a foot long and several inches wide, leaning against the

walls and face up on a table in the center of the room. Each painting, painstakingly created with acrylic paint, colored pencil, glitter, gold and silver leaf, and bits of fabric and lace, glistened with the preponderance of metallic leaf. Every imagined face was drawn with such detail and precision as to suggest a portrait made from life; they are distinct as one would find in any random grouping of women. They are fictional and composites, but as real to O'Connell as if they were her dearest friends.

Each sister of sorts stands facing the world, in full frontal bearing, largely and unabashedly nude and with direct, unapologetic expressions. Hands lay over chests in prayer, above heads or on either side of their faces. Each woman has unique costuming or props—extravagant floral headwear, a snake or floral wrapping around the body, hugging full hips and encircling breasts. Gold lacy belts drape across abdomens and several women have apples on their heads, perhaps a sideways reference to the Garden of Eden.

Who are these women and what is behind O'Connell's near frenzied pace in producing them? They seem to spring to life as quickly as she can conjure them. They are part amazon, part saint, part universal woman. One would be forgiven for thinking they are somewhat autobiographical or that they are made up of facets of women she knows and admires.

DEIRDRE O'CONNELL ARTIST BIO

Deirdre O'Connell's current series of small paintings are inspired by the works by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. O'Connell's passion for Chekhov's texts is more than that of an avid playgoer. She has appeared in many Chekhov productions as a stage and film actress for more than 25 years, most recently playing Liubov Ranyevskaya in *Cherry Orchard*. O'Connell moves her characters from stage to the canvas, giving them an eternal role in a perpetual performance. The artist's paintings evoke Medieval icons in their small scale, golden hues, built up paint, flat perspective and deliberately distorted anatomy.

O'Connell was born in Philadelphia and raised in Pittsfield, MA. She is a self-trained artist, who attended the Studio School, NYC in 2003. She has exhibited her work at the Gallery at Jimmy's Number 43, NYC, and the Broderick Fine Art Gallery, Freehold, NY.

DEIRDRE O'CONNELL ARTIST STATEMENT

"Making is a form of protection."

- Liza Lou

I'm writing this from my nest in the woods in upstate New York where I've made a lot of these paintings over the last three years. It is March 28th, 2020. The Coronavirus has put us in quarantine from each other and in fear for our lives and in mourning for those we are losing.

The world is turned upside down.

I thought the world was turned upside down when I started this body of work right after the 2016 presidential election. Little did I know. I had gone to the Woman's March in Washington, D.C. and stood in a huge crowd of women silently looking through a chain-link fence at the White House in the distance. That was when I first thought of what I wanted to make; a quiet, fierce row of ladies, a wall of protection, a wall of Eves.

Now there are 21 plaques on wood. The initial drawings began as many drafts on paper that I photographed on my iPad, worked on with a painting app, printed out, drew over again and finally cut out and glued onto wood as the first of many layers of acrylic paint, water soluble crayons and pencils, gold and silver leaf, fabric and lace, glitter and jewelry that make up the work. Each painting goes through many stages, and I find myself going back and forth between working digitally and detailed handwork with the elements.

While working on them, I thought a lot about depictions of Eve, icons and altars. I thought about hiding and revealing, protecting and challenging. Some began with a specific protection, spell or hope in mind; protection from a violent man, help in getting or not getting pregnant, relief from sickness. Some revealed their meaning to me slowly, some are still a mystery.

The work of making them was a salve in a hard but galvanizing time. I hope that looking at them offers up some of that.

MALCOLM MORAN

I was introduced to Malcolm Campbell Moran's artwork at a Molly Barnes' Brown Bag Artist Talk last year. Moran, born in New Orleans in 1948, lives in Greenwich, CT. He has dual undergraduate degrees from the University of the South in Sewanee, TN, in history and a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, RI. While attracted to Moran's haunted landscapes and curious animal portrait paintings, I was most struck by the stark, yet highly emotional portraits of people familiar to Moran and others of saints and historical figures.

During a visit to a friend's studio in the 90s, Moran noticed a photo gallery of an assortment of people pinned on a wall above his workspace. He recognized some faces (like Mahatma Gandhi) while others were unfamiliar. He asked who they were, and his friend explained that they were a "daily reminder of people who had significantly changed his life..." The images included a high school teacher, his father and a few others.

This sent the artist on a similar journey. “Twenty or so years ago, I began painting and drawing people who had significantly changed my life by their words and deeds,” says Moran. “As prints worked their way in to my repertoire of art making, I began to express my gratitude toward these significant influences through these prints.” Moran finds the monoprint process more immediate and less labored than painting, thus lending itself to the creation of a series.

The suite of eight portraits included in the exhibition range from depictions of Saint Sebastian--who Moran admires for his tenacity and perseverance--to Selina, who Moran says was like a second mother during his childhood. Some wear hats, others smoke or wear glasses. Each is simply and starkly drawn, naked in bearing, fully exposed with all the counter expressions of both human frailty and strength.

MALCOLM MORAN ARTIST BIO

Malcolm Moran was born in 1948 in New Orleans, LA. He has dual undergraduate degrees from the University of the South in Sewanee, TN, in history, and a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, RI. He has exhibited at RISD Museum, Lilly Islin Gallery, Virginia Lynch Gallery, in Rhode Island; and the Contemporary Art Center and Simonne Stern Gallery and Aldrich Leatherman Gallery in New Orleans; 571 Projects in New York, the Center for Contemporary Printmaking in Connecticut, among others. He has received fellowships from the Vermont Studio Center in Vermont and the Cill Rialiaig Art Center in Ireland. He prints regularly with master printers at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking in Norwalk, CT; 10 Grand Press in Brooklyn, NY; and Anthony Kirk Editions in New York.

MALCOLM MORAN STATEMENT

The work in this exhibition is a subject near to my heart—Saints. Saints are real saints, like *Saint Sebastian*, who embody some metaphors of life that have attracted my attention. In the case of Sebastian, that would be, perseverance, tenaciousness, and willingness to let go of earthly power for something perceived to be much greater. On the other end of the spectrum would be saints with a small “s”. Day to day saints who found their way into my life to leave their mark, such that their influence has remained for years, helping me through all sorts of trouble, like *Selina*, who I call my second mother.