



In Conversation

KIRSTEN BEETS

Dreamland 4 July - 4 August

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Cape Town based artist, Kirsten Beets, paints up a dreamworld, curiously rendered in an almost bizarrely realistic and detailed manner. Her paintings transport the viewer to a quiet, thought-provoking place where imagination rules supreme, you're guaranteed to want to linger longer, and invited to discover the carefully crafted subtleties and hidden meanings that exemplify this artist's playful humour. For a moment she enables us to breathe and escape all the stresses and business of life.

We catch up with Kirsten as she prepares for her fourth solo exhibition at the gallery, 'Dreamland'. The exhibition will open on the 4th of July and run until the 4th August 2018.

You are currently working towards your fourth solo exhibition, 'Dreamland', which will open at Salon Ninety One during July. Such a rich imaginative title, could you share your interpretation thereof, perhaps give us an introduction to what you will be exploring in this body of work?

I felt like it was an appropriate title because my work has always had a dreamlike quality to it. Tigers in greenhouses or beside swimming pools, tiny tourists wandering a white page or swimming in solid shapes of colour are only things that can be found in an imaginative dreamland. I have also been feeling lately that the world can be loud, volatile and stressful and I wanted to create a space where the artworks could have a still, dreamlike or meditative quality.



Previous Page: *It's Alright, Once You're In*, 2018, Oil on linen, 92,5x132cm
Above: *Framed In Broad Daylight*, 2018, Oil On Paper, 32X42cm



Finders Keepers. Water soluble oil paint on paper. 41,5x54,4cm



Cat Lady, 2018. Oil on board. 320x420mm

That is not to say that the subjects within the works are still but that a moment has been captured and rendered in a way that makes it precious and creates a safe space.

What can viewers expect from this exhibition in terms of medium and scale?

I am working mainly with oil paint on paper and board. There will be a range of sizes from small to large pieces.

In your opinion, what is the most beautiful thing you've ever created?

I always hope that the next thing I make is the most beautiful thing.

Historically, the majority of artists seem to focus on one major theme or subject throughout their careers. Do you have any preferred or recurrent subject matter that you tend to revisit in your practice?

I have several things that I keep going back to. I like greenery, gardens and greenhouses. I also like people-watching and animals. They all find their way into my paintings at some stage.

Which local artists' work do you really admire? Are there any international artists who have captured your attention this year?

Georgina Berens' beautiful lithographs, Katrine Claassens' golden miniatures, Frances Goodman's intricate sequins works, Katrin Coetzer's sensitivity and use of colour Internationally, I love Emily Filler's colourful collage, and Benjamin Bjorklund, a Swedish painter.

Would you say that you observe any trends in the art world?

I like to do my own thing although I wouldn't claim to be isolated completely from what is going on around me, because I think part of being an artist is taking in things that are going on and presenting an idea in a different or unique way. I also think that finding your own mark-making and artistic voice is a challenge and constantly comparing yourself to what people are doing is counter-productive.

Tell us about the connection you make between people at leisure and the natural world in your work.

People at leisure are generally in a safe space, a place that has been constructed especially to be used by them, like parks, pools or gardens. When I add an animal to those situations I'm doing it as a reminder that there's still a wild world out there and to add some tension into an idyllic leisurely scene.

Your work appears to capture isolated moments frozen in time. What significance does this hold for you?

I work from photographic reference. So when I take a photo of a scene it captures a tiny slice of time. Preserving it in paint can lengthen that moment for as long as the painting survives. It gives the viewer a chance to engage in a split second of time for as long as they want.

Was there a particular moment in your life that inspired you to become a painter?

I made an owl out of two pom-poms in preschool. I even stuck on a little graduation flat cap. That was my way of showing that owls are wise. It was a masterpiece in felt, wool, glue and googly eyes. I was very proud.

“Her paintings transport the viewer to a quiet, thought-provoking place where imagination rules supreme”

I think it was the first time I realized that if I could put raw materials into the right order and stick them in the right places I could create something more than the sum of those parts. I could make a little personality or a story or something that people would recognize and respond to. It was unselfconscious art-making which is such a fleeting thing. I don't know if this specifically inspired me to become a painter but it did instill some confidence in my art-making abilities.

What is most important to you: Process, material, concept, form, colour, subject, composition or outcome?

Colour is becoming more important to me. I have been including flat colour backgrounds or priming my boards with colour before I start.

What are your major artistic influences?

I love botanical illustration, old Dutch Masters packed with strange detail and hidden meaning. I also love travel and spending time in nature.

Do you consider yourself somewhat of a dreamer?

Yes, absolutely. I am a big fan of daydreaming. I try to let my imagination run wild. Where else can you be completely free but in your own mind?

What do you believe characterizes your work? What makes your style identifiable and unique?

The amount of detail I put into my work. I also tend to paint in quite a realistic manner. Most of my subjects are small-scale but I have also done bigger work. I also think there is a playful humour that comes out in my paintings.

Can you tell us about your process? Would you say that you work quite intuitively or in a more structured manner?

I usually work in a structured way. I tend to not play around too much on the final image. I'll have an idea, play with it using sketches and then create different options or small experiments. Once I'm happy with what I feel is the end result I'll start painting the final work. Sometimes the process is hard and sometimes it comes easily. I still make adjustments as I go but I like to have an end point in mind.

A hyena perched on top of your desk, a leopard keeping a watchful eye over sunbathers in Hyde Park, a tiger poised on a lounge in a suburban jungle, a crowd of nudist tourists in St Marks ... it seems the subconscious plays an important role in your work. Can you elaborate on this please?

I guess it goes back to being a dreamer. I like making situations that are represented in the real world but could not exist. I view these strange situations from the safety of my own daydreams but I want to visually communicate them to other people in the hope that they will also find them enjoyable or thought-provoking.

Your paintings are rich and complex both in terms of their subject matter, as well the high level of detail to which they are executed. How important is it to you that the viewer experiences something of this intensity?

I think people don't engage in work enough, I'm guilty of it too. I think the world is pretty busy and managing to find the quiet space needed to look and engage with an artwork is tough. I wanted to make work that rewards people who actually took the time to really look at it. I also wanted to make work that you could take home and continue to find new things within it to appreciate.

What are your plans for the remainder of 2018?

I will be focusing on paintings for the gallery booth at the Turbine and Joburg Art Fairs, hopefully, for Paris as well.



Grow (Detail), 2017, Oil on paper, 81x61,5cm