



## Autumn Ramsey

interview by **Daphné Mookherjee** images courtesy of the Artist  
**Crèvecœur, Paris, and Park View / Paul Soto**

Red Sphinx, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
61 × 51 cm

Pas un chat, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
46 × 61 cm



Perfect, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
76 × 61 cm

Face of a Woman, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
41 × 51 cm

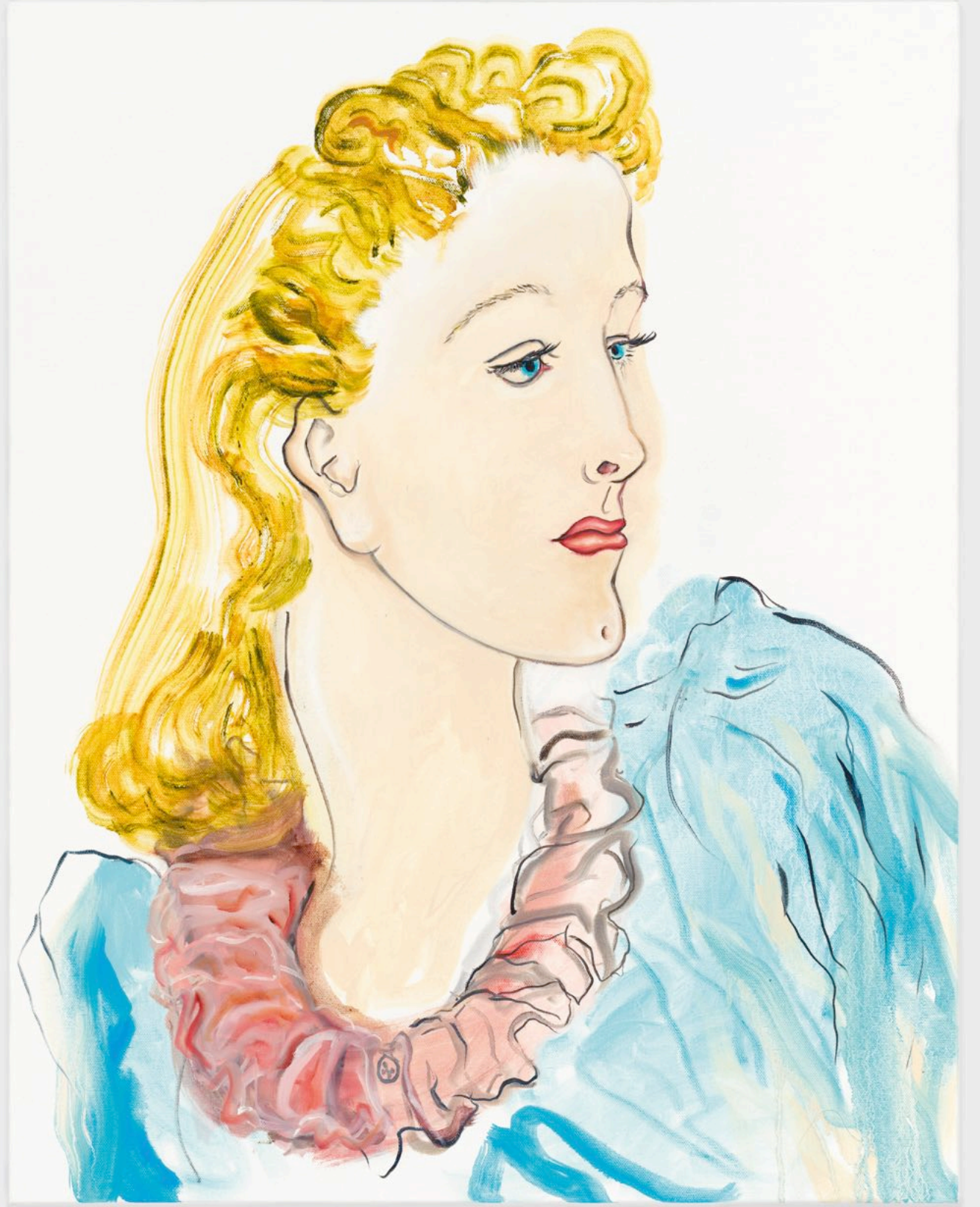
Unresolved Hawk, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
76 × 61 cm





Self Portrait, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 61 cm

The Face, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
71 x 55 cm



Eros, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
76 x 61 cm



How would you define your practice? I hesitate to define my practice too precisely but in general, my work revels in the complexities of the body. It builds on ideas of identity, beauty, conflict, and gratification with each painting framing the relationships between these characterizations in one way or another. The desires that they make visible are at the core of my practice. While each painting is an expression in itself, taken together my work grapples with the role of tradition in the shaping of contemporary myths and helps visualize the social construction of difference with empathy and humor.

In my earlier work I focused on making paintings that represented bodies that were often ambiguously gendered and explored both their expressive potential and our perverse characterizations of them. The predator-and-prey motifs that developed represent this marrying of opposites that seems inherent in us all. It seems an appropriate metaphor for the conflicted, complicated situation of being alive.

What are the main themes in your work? I have always been interested in identity, sexuality, beauty, and mortality, as well as the physical situation that we occupy. Both are distinct but inseparable from each other and shape each other in unexpected and sometimes unsettling ways. For example, in *Unresolved Hawk*, 2018, the emotional turmoil and seeming irresolution expressed in the image is at odds with the equilibrium and resolution of its composition. Taken together, they paint a picture of the complexity of these interests.

Do you have a process of work, a recurrent creative schema, and do you create your art piece following a path? My paintings often begin without preparatory drawings or sketches. I work slowly and determinedly, painting directly onto the canvas in oil paint without a preconceived outcome in mind. I paint sitting at an easel using a table as a pallet which allows me to spend long uninterrupted periods of time painting. While I often work from images I have gathered from various sources, the result is always surprisingly spontaneous and you can often see that in the handling of the paint and the way I arrive at an image in my work. As far as a schema, framework or outline, it is initially very general and the structure that guides an exhibition is usually articulated in detail when I am selecting works to be exhibited.

The work tends to lead me as much as I lead the work, if that makes sense? Often ideas and issues that have a relationship emerge more clearly at that point and it is more effective and often more prudent to orchestrate these relationships after the work is completed rather than trying to shoehorn or force a painting inadequately into a particular conversation. At least that is been the way that organizing my practice has worked the best for me.

I can give you an example—when I was selecting paintings for the 2018 exhibition at Chapter NY, I was going through a turbulent time and the painting represented that. I was feeling vulnerable, and seeing the paintings together I realized that I needed to add a totem, a figure that represented spiritual significance, and so I added an earlier painting *Psyche*, 2012, to the exhibition. The addition of this smaller painting along with the inclusion of *Little Bird*, 2016, balanced the more frightening and nihilist aspects of some of

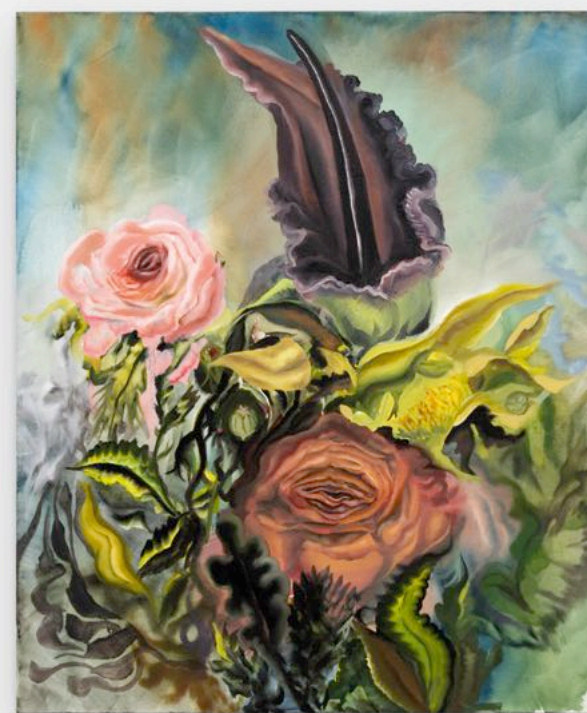
the other work and created what for me was a more complex and emotionally engaging and fulfilling exhibition.

Do you have any reference, influence, inspirations and where do they come from? I draw from a diverse selection of reference materials that helps me build the narratives that I am interested in developing. For example, in my painting *The Sphinx*, which was exhibited at *Galerie Crèvecoeur* in 2018, I specifically reference Gustave Moreau's iconic image and French Symbolist painting in general in a way that unpacks and perhaps builds upon the relationship and dynamic between Oedipus and the Sphinx. I emphasized the Sphinx's threatening presence despite its lesser size. The male figure's position became subordinate to the Sphinx, who perches over him and gazes menacingly into his eyes. In other works, the narrative is more traditionally iconic, using imagery abstracted from a range of cultural and historic sources ranging from ancient Greece to vaudeville and Japanese prints. In others, I use abstraction to reference a very different but ultimately similar lexicon of cultural, historical and philosophical references. In all the work, I ask the viewer to look more acutely at the paintings, their associations, and ultimately ourselves. Using historically recognizable narratives in this way serves to ground my expression and to make it easily understood. In the more abstract images, the stipes and shapes originally came from working on backgrounds for paintings and they became images in themselves. It is funny how that happens, something that seems tangential can take on the role of a figurative element by simply changing the frame of reference. That often happens in my work.

Do you think that art should be committed to something political? I think artists benefit from being politically committed, whether an artwork should be politically committed is another question and how that might be manifest complicates things further. In my case, it is hard not to see a commitment but it is also difficult to determine what precisely that commitment is. By its very nature, my practice strives to occupy multiple positions and I respect, even relish, that aspect of my work.

For you as a spectator, what are you looking for in art? I am not looking for something specific in art or culture so much as a desire to feel connected. I want to be understood and respected and I am drawn to expressions that foster those feelings in me in relation to others' work and expressions, many of which are not formally considered art.

What feelings or message do you want to transmit though you work? About the spectators, the viewers, how do you want them to receive and understand your work? I would like my work to be understood as the personal framing of both myself and the viewer as the perceiving subject addressing a range of expressions from euphoric empowerment, to the inevitable loss of our bodies and the terror and catharsis of change. I am describing it in terms of individual expressions but my work is as much in the space between these expressions as it is embodied in any single work. It is the way in which we define ourselves through multiple understandings that taken together begin to describe something complete. I would like my work to be received in this spirit, in the spirit that it was conceived in.



Costume, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
61 × 76 cm

Psyche, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
46 × 61 cm

Femme, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
61 × 51 cm

Untitled, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 41 cm

Cher Rosé, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
61 x 51 cm

Autumn Ramsey  
Crèvecoeur, Paris  
25.04.20 — 05.06.20  
Opening: 24.04.20

