



Galerie Gregor Staiger
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SOMAYA CRITCHLOW

Blow-Up

September 4—October 30, 2021

T: What's so important about my bloody pictures?

T: Nothing like a little disaster for sorting things out.

T: Don't let's spoil everything, we've only just met.

J: No, we haven't met. You've never seen me.

UM: ...The earth is just an atom of the universe!

UM: Every time I think about the order of things I start to get crazy!

Galerie Gregor Staiger is pleased to present 'Blow-Up', the first solo exhibition in Zurich by London-based artist, Somaya Critchlow.

The exhibition's title, 'Blow-Up' is derived from both the 1966 Michelangelo Antonioni cult film and Shintaro Kago's graphic manga comic, which share the same name. Within both the film and the manga, parallels can be found in their manipulation of imagery that is 'blown up' to the point of abstraction. In the manga, the figures in the comic strip and the comic strip itself break down into atoms (in the form of tiny drawings, parodies and repetitions of themselves) only to eventually return to the whole picture.

Critchlow's use of this conceptual preface suggests a darker thematic tone within these new works, and the interiors within the framing of the canvas are more defined than in earlier works. Repeated in three of the paintings on show, the mise-en-scene places Critchlow's subjects in a bedroom, furnished with a solitary, dangling lightbulb and a pink iron bed frame. Viewing the works alongside each other, one also cannot help recalling Critchlow's starting point for the exhibition and its title, in both the filmic nature and almost a scene-by-scene narrative structure that could be unfolding.

In the bedroom, the singular light bulb hangs on a delicate string illuminating an otherwise dark space, reminiscent of Philip Guston's use of the object in his '70's paintings, occupying the defining space. Critchlow also references Walter Sickert's Camden Town paintings both in the title of the work *The Iron Pink Bedstead* and by inclusion of the iron bedframe itself. Further, in the smallest painting in the exhibition, a fishbowl is in sight on the right-hand bottom corner of the canvas. Goblet-like, it is precariously suspended by a thin stem resting on a base. Featured in an earlier painting, it is reinvented in *The Fishbowl (Scream)* unashamedly lifted from Balthus' 'The Goldfish' 1948.

Alongside the four new paintings are drawings which Critchlow describes as being slower and more thorough in their process, than previous drawn works, having been made during the last UK winter lockdown. For Critchlow drawing has become a standalone part of her work, outside of its usual function as a preparatory rehearsal for paintings. In the drawing *We eat the smile/spit out the teeth a young woman* is depicted squatting down on her heels whilst eating a slice of watermelon, which points to the racist trope of the fruit. Critchlow offers a distorted viewpoint on the subject, just as the title of the show would suggest blowing-up the original meaning, to find there is a moment in which we grasp reality, but then the moment passes.



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Somaya Critchlow (*1993, London) lives and works in London. She obtained her BA in Painting at the University of Brighton before joining The Royal Drawing School in London, where she earned a Postgraduate Diploma in 2017. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include 'Ellen Berkenblit / Somaya Critchlow', Grice Bench, Los Angeles (2021); 'Underneath a Bebop Moon', Maximillian William, London (2020); 'Sincere for Synonym', Fortnight Institute, New York (2019) 'Time Never Mattered', Efrain Lopez, Chicago (2018). Group shows featuring her work include 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2021); 'Present Generations', Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, USA (2021); 'Drawing Biennial 2021' Drawing Room, London (2021); 'and I will wear you in my heart of heart', FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2021); '(Nothing but) Flowers', Karma, New York (2020); 'Xenia: Crossroads in Portrait Painting', Marianne Boesky, New York (2020), amongst others. Critchlow's work is featured in numerous public collections including the Baltimore Museum of Art; RISD Museum, Providence; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; ICA Miami and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, Norwich.

Critchlow is currently featured in 'Get Lifted!' at Karma, New York, curated by Hilton Als, and will show as part of 'Women Painting Women', at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, USA in 2022.