

# NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

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## JESSE MOCKRIN

*Syrinx*

December 1, 2018 – January 19, 2019

Night Gallery is thrilled to present a solo exhibition of new works by Jesse Mockrin entitled *Syrinx*. This is Mockrin's third exhibition at the gallery, following *The Progress of Love* in 2016 and *Midnight Sun* in 2014.

*Syrinx* takes its name from the wood nymph of Classical Greek mythology, often mentioned alongside Pan, god of nature, who became enamored of her and began to chase her through the forest. Syrinx, desperate to flee, asked for help from the water nymphs, who turned her into river reeds so that she could escape him. Overwhelmed with frustrated desire, Pan cut the reeds, and with them created the first panpipes. The myth has appeared in paintings throughout history, invoked by artists including Peter Paul Rubens and Noël-Nicholas Coppel as a testament to passion as the root of artistic creation. Absent from that commentary, however, is a consideration of Syrinx's reaction to Pan, a reframing by which the story becomes one of a woman who chooses to end her life rather than be raped – of female terror existing at the site of male expression, perhaps as its very basis.

Jesse Mockrin's diptych "*Syrinx*," 2018, cites both Rubens' and Coppel's paintings and places them side by side, cropping gestures from each one and painting them isolated them against backgrounds of matte black. A mere inch apart, the two panels at first appear to present one continuous image. Close inspection, however, reveals two iterations of the same scene: a man's arms reaching for a woman who flees him, just barely out of grasp. Citing works painted one hundred years apart, both of which refer to the same legend of antiquity, Mockrin's arresting painting suggests a vicious, violent cycle of history, transforming the source material in a stunning redress of ancient narratives with an all-too-familiar imbalance at their foundation.

The audacious, masterful works that comprise the exhibition *Syrinx* all employ this simultaneous quotation and intervention, deriving references from Baroque history paintings of mythical and biblical scenes, Renaissance-era etchings and drawings of witches, and hunting paintings from the Romantic period. In dialogue with one another, these citations explore depictions of women and violence across several hundred years: the first category considers images of women

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under duress, while the second category reclaims the condemned figure of the witch as a feminist forebear. The hunting paintings, meanwhile, emphasize the threat of violence throughout the works, nodding to the commonplace nature of violence in the history of painting – dating back to the first known paintings – and pointing to the class system within which these depictions of brutality would become markers of status.

Mockrin's methods of cropping, enlargement, and combination destabilize her source material, invigorating them with new significance even where her renderings remain faithful. These monumental, staggeringly exacting paintings are a testament to the meticulous depth of Mockrin's research and the utter virtuosity of her hand, yet the series transcends the boundaries of her individual perspective, operating instead at the scope of history and the elevated register of the iconographic. As Mockrin herself puts it, "I want to explore things that aren't so much tied to my experience but to the history of images, the images that we consume, and larger societal questions... People talk about making the personal universal, but I am actually more interested in the public record." In *Syrinx*, we find Mockrin's offerings to history, themselves documents of a present-day society urgently grappling against its enduring demons.

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**Jesse Mockrin** (b. Silver Spring, MD, 1981) received her M.F.A. from the University of California, San Diego, in 2011, and her B.A. from Barnard College, New York, in 2003. Mockrin has had solo exhibitions at Night Gallery (Los Angeles), Nathalie Karg Gallery (New York), and Galerie Perrotin (Seoul). In 2016 she had a major presentation at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, and her work is also in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Hans-Joachim and Gisa Sander Foundation. Mockrin's work has been covered extensively, appearing in publications including *Artforum*, *The New Yorker*, *T Magazine*, *Modern Painters*, and *Art Agenda*, among others. She lives and works in Los Angeles.