

Despite its expansive, all-encompassing title, *We Contain Multitudes* is essentially a show about the communicative potential of the small. Bringing together the disparate practices of Ali Banisadr (b.1976 Tehran, Iran), Amy Cutler (b. 1974 NY, US), Ian Davis (b. 1972 IN, US), Jules de Balincourt (b. 1972 Paris, France) Maryam Hoseini (b. 1988 Tehran, Iran) and Matthew Ronay (b. 1976 KT,US), it investigates the miniature as a metaphor, pushing beyond its traditional association with a specific art historical tradition, a simple reduction in scale or a certain preciousness. Though none of the included artists reference traditional miniatures directly, their works do share many of the characteristics commonly associated with them: vivid jewel-like colors, precise details and intricate patterns, compressed pictorial space, and stage-like settings that declare these works as being resolutely non-mimetic.

Small groups of people engaged in somewhat inexplicable activities reappear in the works of Cutler, Davis, and de Balincourt. De-individualized through stylization and repetition, the figures remain archetypal and anonymous, despite sometimes being quite detailed, as in the case of Cutler especially. Situated within blank fields of white, her precisely rendered vignettes infuse the banal and humdrum everyday of women's work with the irreverent potential for fantasy and wonder. In *Intervention* (2018), three identically dressed women stand among a gaggle of geese. The birds' thin necks extend up and off the top edge of the frame creating a screen of vertical branches, barren save for the occasional feather or two, that seem to imprison the women behind it.

In contrast to the pastoralism of Cutler's whimsical fairy-tale universe, the environments Davis' groups of near-identical men inhabit are clearly manmade. In his paintings, space, action and the body are all carefully structured and choreographed, subject to an abiding totalitarian and martial logic that is expressed through strategies of industrial organization. A cadre of uniformed men inspect the inside of an industrial facility in *Advocates* (2018); a somewhat incongruous and decidedly non-masculine pastel pink pervades the scene, infusing the space and structures within it with fleshy undertones, subtly suggesting the interchangeability of body and machine within the military industrial complex.

Investigating the power of both spectacle and the gaze, Jules de Balincourt's vividly colored paintings present contemporary allegories of looking and being looked at. In *Watchers* (2016) waiting paparazzi are transposed from their natural urban habitat into a decidedly more rural setting; this dislocation positions the group as ornithologists, playfully opening up the possibility that the elusive object of their voyeuristic desire might not be, or not only be, celebrity but avian.

In contrast these artists, narrative is consciously held in check in the more abstract works of Banisadr, Hoseini and Ronay. In these works, the body appears not as protagonist but in a state of disassembly, deconstructed and then reconfigured into novel arrangements. In *All the World's a Stage* (2018), Banisadr gently coaxes figures out of a chaos of expressive brushstrokes and gestural smears through the careful application of intricate details. Approximating presence through the strategic placement of dots, dashes, lines and squiggles, he suggests a fantastical gathering of Bosch-like creatures in the foreground.

Hoseini's approach is more restrained, almost analytical. In *Women with Green Lies (1)* and *(2)* (2018), the female body is flattened and dissected into its constituent parts. Detached limbs and headless torsos float in similarly compressed frames. The figure becomes a diagram, and Hoseini's paintings present schematics for new corporeal architectures, novel ways of understanding, configuring and inhabiting bodies. These recalibrations are designed to resist the violence routinely experienced by the female body. The hardened silhouettes become a form of armor, shielding against the troubling intrusions of the male gaze.

Ronay also deconstructs and reassembles the body, but he does it not by flattening it but by zooming in through its skin and turning it inside out, revealing its previously concealed and contained innards. Displayed theatrically on individual plinths, his lurid sculptures are composed of biomorphic forms that suggest organs and organelles. He approaches the body through unconventional perspectives and scales, like the forensic and the microscopic. A perverse assemblage of protuberances and orifices, *Diurnal Event* (2016) is a hermaphroditic flesh machine that joyously flouts sexual binaries.

Across these works the body emerges not as a defined structure but a terrain of possibility, a contested site, a locus of negotiation and experimentation. Cutler, Davis and de Balincourt understand the body as endlessly performative, a dynamic vehicle for the ongoing and never-ending projections of self and other, while Banisadr, Hoseini and Ronay deconstruct the body's conventional form and structure, recombining the resulting parts to construct new corporeal configurations. These works illustrate various recalibrations of how bodies are represented, understood and inhabited. They seem particularly appropriate for our contemporary moment when subjectivity is increasingly understood and experienced as fluid not fixed, dispersed across the many avatars of the self we project through social media into the vast interconnected global network of the internet. These cultural shifts are bolstered by scientific and technological developments and theoretical provocations that challenge the notion that biology is undeniable fact, that transcend the body's biological and physical limits, rendering it permeable and mutable. This sea change challenges traditional understandings of subjectivity, marking a shift from essence to enunciation. The figure no longer serves as a representation of being but as a performance of becoming, it is no longer a protagonist but a projection. Read allegorically, the works in this exhibition implore us as humans to recognize our complexity and multiplicity, to acknowledge ourselves as microcosms. We do, indeed, contain multitudes.