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Eleanor Swordy
Earth Signs, Issues of Abstraction and Representation
Moskowitz Bayse
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by Jody Zellen



In her latest exhibition, *Earth Signs*, Brooklyn-based artist Eleanor Swordy continues to paint individuals and groups of abstracted, bulbous figures. Often depicted from above or straight on, Swordy's figures dominate her canvases, appearing like blow-up dolls that have been flattened and rolled onto the picture plane to fill the available space. These figures are somewhat reminiscent of Picasso's women, while simultaneously suggesting modern day adult Putti. Swordy not only abstracts the shape of the body, but also gives the figures a cartoony presence by reducing their facial features to dots and lines.

While Swordy's backgrounds reference locale and provide context, the works are concerned with the formal aspects of painting— specifically issues of abstraction and representation as Swordy employs an exaggerated flatness and explores how these shapes can sign for human beings with recognizable emotions.

This is Fine (all works 2020) is a painting of a squatting male at the seashore wearing tiny red swimming trunks. The position of his body and legs form a wide squat that suggest the shape of a heart. The three small dots in the center of his chest (and the center of the painting) signify his nipples and belly button, while also creating another face within his body. He casually rolls a light blue mat over sand cluttered with detritus where the beach meets the water's edge. The sentiment — "*this is fine*" — alludes to this as an acceptable location to sunbathe despite the trash.

Pandora is a similarly stylized painting of a sole female figure. She gazes into an open chest — a geometric shape comprised of four deep rust and brown rectangles. A flurry of light akin to stardust explodes from the open box illuminating the figure's face displaying an expression of shock and perhaps awe. As the title suggests, opening Pandora's box can unleash the unexpected.

Air Signs is a humorous painting in which five abstracted and monochrome figures recline on top of clouds that float in a light blue sky. Colorful confetti encircles both the figures and clouds becoming a different type of 'stardust.' *Pack It In* depicts a large naked female figure who relaxes on a puffy white cloud or blanket. She holds an orange fly-swatter and stares at the fly stuck upon it. Encircling her are other flies, as well as strange small floating colored objects. Her minimal features — two dots for eyes and a short line for a nose — gaze past the action around her toward the blue sky beyond.

Swordy's cartoony figures display a childlike innocence that is often contradicted by the settings and interactions within the paintings. The works are tantalizing— hopeful yet at the same time revelatory about the current state of the world. The images offer some respite through the depiction of fantasy worlds where innocence reigns. Yet, they also suggest that it is impossible to escape one's fate.

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