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Art Now LA

Hannah Morris Acting Ordinary
Collapsing Space and Time
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by Jody Zellen



Hannah Morris is a painter based in Barre, Vermont, whose narrative works incorporate images culled from stories and advertisements in American magazines from the 1940s-1970s. Morris collages disparate reproductions filled with figures, furniture, objects and urban or natural landscapes and then overpaints them with Flashe and Gouache on panel. She masks the photographic veracity of the originals while creating new contexts for the characters. The eight works on view present a range of scenarios filled with people going about their business and not necessarily interacting with each other, even though they seem to occupy the same space.

Depicted in *Cottage Industry* (2022) is a man relaxing and reclining on a bed atop a patterned flower quilt, two other figures building a clay pot, a boy shuffling index cards, as well as a woman parading with a small red flag in celebration or protest. Knowing that, Morris gets her source material from various magazines — craft, lifestyle, humor and news — and then chooses fragments that she initially composites in her mind, before actually collaging them together. These backgrounds serve as the sketches and under paintings for the final works. Conscious of gender, race and class differences portrayed in the now historical advertisements and editorial stories, Morris juxtaposes people and objects that might not otherwise coexist. Although little remains of the original images, the contours of the magazine fragments are still visible below layers of often translucent water-based paint.

In *The Crossing* (2022), Morris presents the goings on at a busy city intersection. While there are no cars, the urban scene is filled with figures of varying ages, shapes, sizes and colors in different types of clothing ranging from the formal (a suit and tie) to the casual (patterned shorts). Toward the back of the painting are tall buildings rendered with a childlike simplicity. A number of unrelated figures dart along a crosswalk— what appears to be a tour guide holding a flag, a worker in carpenter's pants, as well as two men who could be dancing. The mood is festive as these individuals come together within the composition, representing the different strata of the city. What stands out in the image and what makes it interesting is the skewed perspective of the buildings as well as the isolation and the disconnect between the varied figures. Morris unites disparate scenarios to create a sense of simultaneity.

This idea is further explored in *Summer Camp* (2023), where Morris juxtaposes two awkward and off-kilter men who appear to be throwing a ball back and forth on a blue-green basketball or tennis court, a girl perched on a bicycle wearing shorts and red sneakers featuring a yellow Nike swoosh, an abstractly rendered picnic area, and a crowd of festively dressed people looking off toward the distance as if ready to run forward, their backs to the viewer. At the bottom of the image are a bird and a duck standing in the grass. Myriad flowers and trees are also depicted within the composition.

In these nostalgic works, Morris collapses space and time. She collages unrelated elements, creating narratives that unite in surprising and satisfying ways. The images are playful reinterpretations of appropriated materials taken from different sources that cohere through Morris' creative juxtapositions and painterly style.

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