

Madison Museum of Contemporary Art and Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art present “Natalie Frank: Unbound”

Frank’s feminist drawings reimagine some of the best-known and most controversial literary narratives.

For Immediate Use: May 4, 2021

MADISON, WI AND KANSAS CITY, MO—The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) and Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art (Kemper Museum) are pleased to announce “Natalie Frank: Unbound,” the first survey exhibition of Brooklyn, New York-based artist Natalie Frank’s (Austin, Texas, born 1980) drawings inspired by some of the best-known and most controversial literary narratives. The exhibition will be on view at MMoCA June 5–October 3, 2021 before traveling to Kemper Museum in Kansas City, MO, where it will be on view from January 28–May 15, 2022.

Spanning a decade of Frank’s feminist drawing practice, “Unbound” will present work from the artist’s four major drawing series, each of which is the result of Frank’s rigorous research. “Fairy tales captivated me because many began as women’s oral tales that articulated female desires and fears,” said Frank. “Yet over time their authorship was erased and their voices neutered. I restore the identities of these overlooked female artists and transform their stories to create contemporary, paradigm-breaking female heroines.”

In “Tales of the Brothers Grimm” (2011–14), Frank presents the unvarnished original nineteenth century versions of these tales as images that celebrate female agency by elevating heroines and villainesses alike. Expanding on the history of illustrated books, figurative painting, and personal and political narrative, Frank’s drawings comprise the largest collection of Grimm’s fairy tales ever portrayed by an artist. In 2019, Ballet Austin commissioned the production of “Grimm Tales,” a full-length ballet based on Frank’s drawings, for which she served as artistic director, bringing three tales to life, creating sets, costumes and animations from new and existing drawings.

With her characteristically fluid gestural marks, Frank adds visual drama to these tales of revolt and transformation. In each of her twenty black-and-white gouache-on-paper drawings, she represents a key scene from Jack Zipes’s anthology “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (2017).

In a suite of gouache and chalk pastel drawings, Frank reclaims the feminist “Story of O” (2017–18) and gives image to the psychosexual narratives of the book’s key scenes. In masterfully carnal compositions, she depicts O, the female protagonist, consensually engaging in scenarios of physical submission, domination, love, lust and sexual freedom. This series deepens Frank’s exploration into intertwined representations of identity and desire, laying bare the power structures and practices surrounding the complicated sexuality of female bodies.

Finally, Frank's drawings of "Madame d'Aulnoy's" (2019–20) shrewd heroines are anything but conventional. She presents the author's fantastical stories through a complex layering of color, form, material, and gesture. Frank's visual contradictions—combinations of abstraction and figuration—parallel d'Aulnoy's female protagonists, who, by embodying both evil and virtuosity, present a nuanced understanding of female identity.

Frank's practice, in dialogue with worldwide conversations about agency, power, gender, and the #MeTOO and TIME'S UP movements, continues to raise questions of equity and advocacy for women's voices. "We need to be asking questions in art," Frank said. "And these are the kinds of questions we should be asking."

"Frank's deep dive into literature is coupled with the practice of driving these conversations forward with her eloquent layering of imagery and subjects explored through a feminist lens," said Erin Dziedzic, one of the curators of the exhibition. "She is moving the needle through her work with historical literature and her commitment to championing female voices both as the authors and subjects of their own experiences."

"Natalie Frank: Unbound" has been organized by MMoCA and Kemper Museum and co-curated by Leah Kolb, curator of exhibitions at MMoCA and Erin Dziedzic, director of curatorial affairs at Kemper Museum.

Kolb said, "This exhibition, which brings together the span of Natalie Frank's drawing practice, provides an opportunity for our two institutions to collaborate in a dynamic way. We are thrilled by the possibilities of our audiences to engage in discussions about transformation, power, and sexuality."

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ABOUT MMoCA

The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art is always admission-free. Its vision is to be an organization that fosters the exchange of ideas and creates experiences that will inspire a wide audience; be a nexus for the work of emerging and established regional, national, and international artists; serve as a catalyst for the continued development of a vigorous community of artists; and provide a forum that will encourage people to be challenged by, reflect on, and make connections between art and the world around them.

The Museum includes four galleries and The Shop, a recently opened space to provide interactive contemporary art experiences and educational workshops to the community. The Museum's Rooftop Sculpture Garden provides an urban oasis with an incredible view which serves as a lovely venue for weddings, art openings, dining, and cinema.

The Museum is open Fridays, Saturday, and Sundays, noon-6 PM. MMoCA also has a slate of online events, including wellness activities, education workshops, and virtual tours. Please visit mmoca.org to learn more.

www.mmoca.org | @mmocamadison

ABOUT KEMPER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Located in Kansas City, MO, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art exhibits, collects, and educates in a free and welcoming environment for all. The museum's growing Permanent Collection aims to reflect the vitality, complexity, and unfolding patterns within modern and contemporary art and culture. Special exhibitions, installations, lectures, and workshops, as well as youth, teen, and intergenerational programs provide resources for communities to engage with the issues of our time, derive inspiration, discover outlets for self-expression and dialogue, learn directly from living artists, and bring deeper meaning to their lives through modern and contemporary art. Admission, programs, and parking are always free.

www.kemperart.org | @kempermuseum