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MARK PUGH

The Girl and Other Stories



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For his very first one-man show, hosted by New York's Arcadia Contemporary, artist Mark Pugh presents roughly 20 fresh paintings that showcase his impressive technical and narrative abilities. As the title of the show suggests, *The Girl and the Empty Mailbox and Other Stories*, the overarching theme of Pugh's new work involves a storybook anthology, while asking the viewer to craft their own interpretation.

"Each painting tells its own little story, but rather than offer a complete narrative for each painting, I wanted to give just enough so that the viewer can formulate their own interpretation, completing and personalizing the stories themselves," Pugh explains. "I mostly use children as subjects in my work, although I tend to juxtapose them with deeper, more mature themes."

The artist shares that paintings *Girl Fixated on the Dark Spot on an Apple* and *Girl Carving a Pumpkin* are perhaps the two darkest paintings of the show—with *Girl Fixated* first appearing as a simple, mundane image of a girl holding an apple. "However, looking more closely, one will notice her almost hypnotic-like stare as she is transfixed on a single, small, black spot of the apple," says Pugh. "The background is barely perceptible, signifying the girl's loss of her own sense of her surroundings as she can focus on nothing but the single black spot."

Without giving away too much, Pugh adds that in his paintings of children, he often explores a loss of innocence or an awakening to worldly knowledge. "While [*Girl Fixated*] may seem as if it were a deliberate analogy to Eve in the Garden of Eden, I never

1 *Girl with an Ornate Mirror and Brush*, oil and ink on linen, 30 x 20"

2 *Sorrow and the Girl with the Flower*, oil and ink on linen, 36 x 24"

3 *Girl Carving a Pumpkin*, oil and ink on linen, 24 x 18"





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even considered it until after the painting was complete,” Pugh notes. “I was perhaps more directly inspired by the Nietzsche quote, ‘If you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.’”

Girl Carving a Pumpkin works in the opposite way, offering the viewer an unsettling image, “but thematically, it’s rather benign,” says Pugh. “Some viewers may conjure their own dark themes with this painting (which I welcome!), but for me it’s much simpler than that—I love the fall, I love pumpkins and I wanted this painting to reflect that. In fact, it was quite intentional on my part to make a painting that appeared almost sinister on the surface, but really had almost nothing actually sinister about it.”

Pugh also admits that he loves to experiment with his process, and with

each painting, he tries to think outside the box, “pushing myself to come up with some new and creative way to explore the medium with regards to composition and storytelling,” he says. “While I recognize that there is a certain consistency

in my work, I try not to limit myself to any one particular method or style. I’ve used graphite, ink, masking fluid and a number of other experimental methods to create the illusion of different mediums and styles.”



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Girl Sitting for a Portrait on an Unusually Windy Day,
oil and ink on linen, 30 x 48"

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Girl and a Sliver of Moon, oil and ink on linen, 12 x 18"

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Girl Fixated on the Dark Spot on an Apple, oil and
graphite on linen, 24 x 24"



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Pugh plays with composition in *Girl with an Ornate Mirror and Brush*, combining oil and ink on linen, where his subject is loosely inspired by Magritte's *Son of Man*. "In this painting, a girl holds a beautifully ornate mirror while brushing her hair," Pugh says. "However, she holds the mirror so close to her face that she cannot see anything else. Meanwhile, we as viewers cannot see the very thing she

is so focused on."

The artist continues, "Paintings of figures so frequently focus on faces. So much of the storytelling comes from faces that I wanted to explore what story I could tell by completely hiding the face. The entire painting, from her dress to the mirror to the roses in the background, frame her in beauty, while I've hidden the most interesting part of any portrait."

For this highly anticipated show, running from April 18 through May 5, Pugh ultimately hopes that "anyone who takes the time to experience my art will feel free to let their imaginations continue the stories I've started." ●

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