

ANGELA FRALEIGH

The Bones of Us Hunger for Nothing

SORDONI ART GALLERY AT WILKES UNIVERSITY
January 16—March 2, 2018

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Acknowledgements by Heather Sincavage
Essay by Eleanor Heartney

Sordoni Art Gallery at Wilkes University
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Acknowledgements

Heather Sincavage, Director

There are those artists whose work stays with you. They depict your thoughts in a way you could not have imagined. Angela Fraleigh is one of those artists.

I became aware of Angela Fraleigh's work about a decade ago and immediately admired her intellect and depth — not to mention a work ethic that is unparalleled by many! Her work draws upon and re-conceptualizes well-known artworks, much-loved narratives, and the female archetypes depicted within them. Especially relevant during our current political climate, Fraleigh unleashes her heroines with agency and 'free will' not seen in her source material.

To present exhibitions such as this one, I always appreciate the support of my colleagues and leadership at Wilkes University. I am equally as fortunate to have the continued reinforcement of the Sordoni Art Gallery Advisory Commission for their guidance and enthusiasm. And an additional thank you to Karley Stasko, graduate assistant, for the creativity and ingenuity she brings to the office on a daily basis.

We live in a day and age where women's voices are becoming a powerful force for change. Fraleigh empowers the viewer to revisit age-old social conventions and to accept nothing less than equality between genders. I want to thank Angie for her warm generosity in sharing her work with our campus and being a catalyst for discussion in our community.

In the Company of Women

Eleanor Heartney

Feminist theorists from Linda Nochlin to John Berger have examined western art's complicity with institutions of power. They point out how the "male gaze" has structured traditional depictions of the female body and analyzed the ways narratives, poses, and figural arrangements are all designed to entice and flatter the male viewer. (Among the most egregious were the works like Francois Boucher's 1745 *Odalisque* arranged coyly across a rumpled bed for maximum butt exposure, or Jean-Honore Fragonard's 1770 *Girl with Dog*, in which the dog's tail strategically masks his mistress's uplifted genitals.)

One outcome of these observations was the emergence of a strain of feminist iconoclasm. In order to resist the objectification of the female body, artists and theorists sought ways to minimize or undermine male pleasure. They outlawed the nude, subverted traditional standards of beauty and in many cases simply removed the body from art. But in doing so, they also delegitimized the experience of the female gaze. Women who enjoyed depictions of flesh and took pleasure in the sexuality of the female body were regarded as reactionary or insufficiently feminist.

But does pleasure have to be exploitative? And are representations of female beauty inherently reactionary? Angela Fraleigh argues that these are false premises. Trained first as a figurative painter and then immersed in the socio-political theories of postmodernism, she has found a way out of the limitations of feminist iconoclasm. Her paintings borrow directly from the kinds of paintings that so infuriated feminist critics. She recreates the voluptuous nudes in the Baroque and Rococo paintings of well and lesser-known masters like Francois Boucher, Francois Lemoyne and Jacob Jordaens. But instead of offering them in the service of male desire, she rewrites the narratives that they enact. Displaced from the boudoir to shadowy forest glens or removed to abstracted spaces interlaced with fragmentary patterns of gold leaf, they exist now in a world of their own, without men and free to enjoy an exclusively female company.

One inspiration for this work is the writings of Marina Warner, a feminist writer who has explored the subtext of familiar fairy tales. Warner reveals how they often represent an oral tradition practiced by women and how many of the earlier unsanitized versions of the stories reflect the strategies of women wrestling with a male dominated world. Later (and often male authored) versions of the stories contain demonic female characters and reflect a societal fear of female solidarity. Warner's writings encouraged Fraleigh to focus on women's gatherings as a locus of psychological and physical freedom.

Her figures' new liberty is matched by an equally uninhibited application of paint. Faces, torsos, arms and legs materialize out of lush passages of translucent color. Washes, drips, splatters and, in recent works, metallic sheens evoke an idealized space in which flesh, fabric and foliage meld into each other. The titles reinforce this impression of a world beyond the world: Something has started to live in you that will live longer than the sun one promises while another exults The bones of us hunger for nothing.

Other feminist artists share Fraleigh's focus on female centered autonomy and eroticism. In the 1970s artists like Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke rebelled against the creeping encroachment of feminist iconoclasm. They celebrated their own bodies in performances that joyously expressed a sexuality driven by female desires. More recently painter Lisa Yuskavage has also mined this territory in lushly painted tableaux of prepubescent and often nude women. She depicts them in a style that is one part centerfold, one part cartoon kitsch and one part rococo exaggeration. But if the works flirt with standard tropes of the "male gaze", they also undermine them. Like Fraleigh, her women exist in a mostly female universe and their consciousnesses are directed, not toward some external male viewer, but inwardly, toward themselves or toward their female companions.

Is the only answer to the current dysfunction between men and women a retreat into an all female utopia? Though they find refreshment in the exclusive company of women, Fraleigh and her kindred spirits are aware that they cannot live there indefinitely. Men are rare in her paintings, but when they do appear, it is in an attitude of listening. This suggests a way forward. Neither gender has a lock on sensuality, eroticism and non-exploitive companionship. The denial of pleasure, no less than the one sided exercise of it, diminishes both men and women. Fraleigh revises the history of art in order to suggest a better future for the whole human community.



Slow

Oil on panel

72 x 96"

2005



What care although your
beauties break and fall

Oil, galkyd resin, glitter
and mylar chards on
canvas over panel

66 x 90"

2009



We come spinning out of
nothingness, scattering
stars like dust

Oil, acrylic and synthetic
resin on canvas,

90 x 130",

2017



You weren't haunted those two days,
you were flooded with light.

Oil and gouache on canvas over panel

66 x 96"

2013



Slight.

Oil and galkyd resin on canvas over panel

72 x 96"

2007



I know that history will have me standing on a side

Oil, acrylic and synthetic resin on canvas

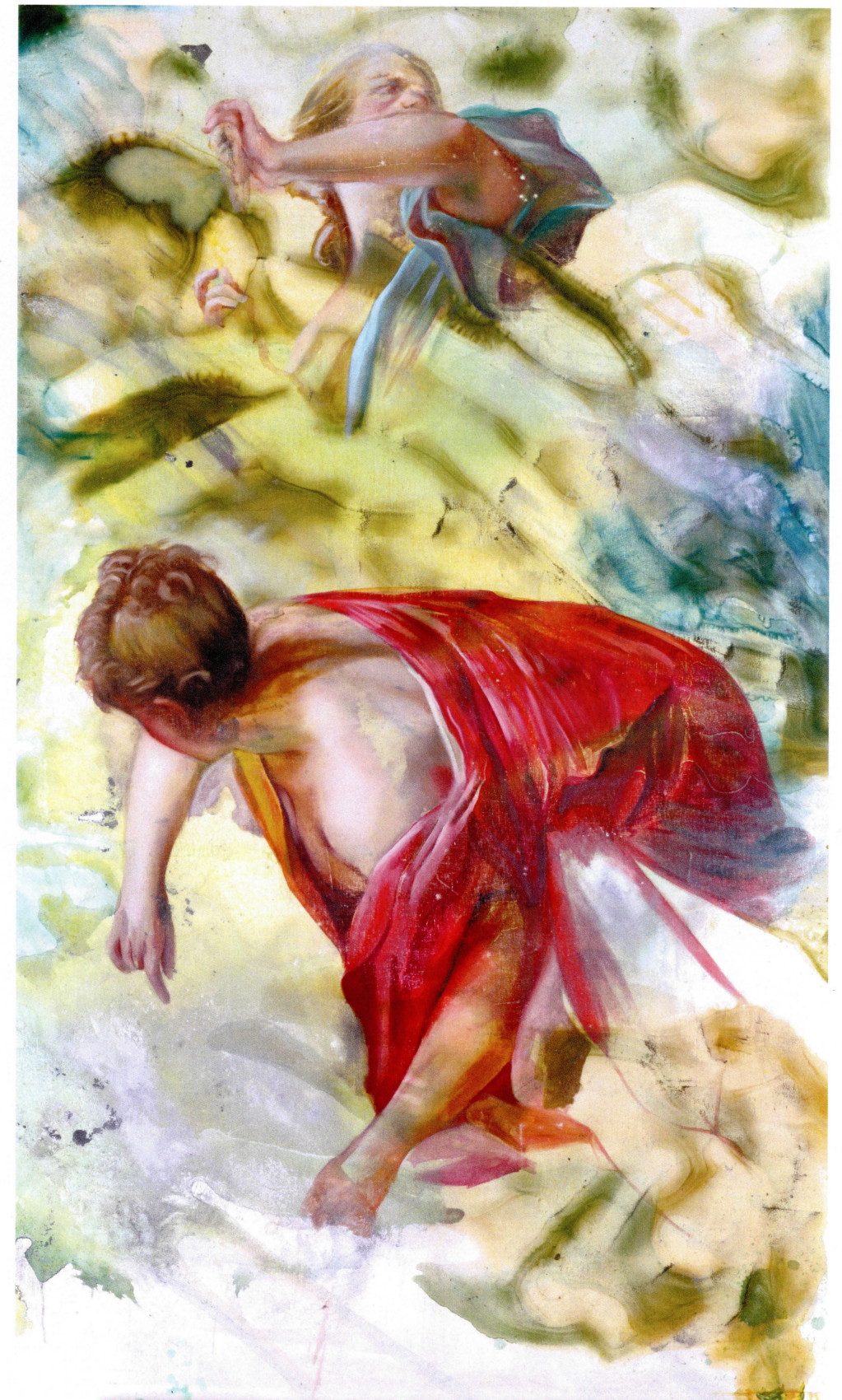
36 x 48"

2017



We know of a land that
looks lonely, but isn't

Oil and silver leaf on canvas
90 x 66"
2017



Lost in the light.

Oil, gouache, mica, graphite
and synthetic resin on canvas

54 x 84"
2015



They would tell each other
you can live with this

Oil on canvas over panel

66 x 90"

2011

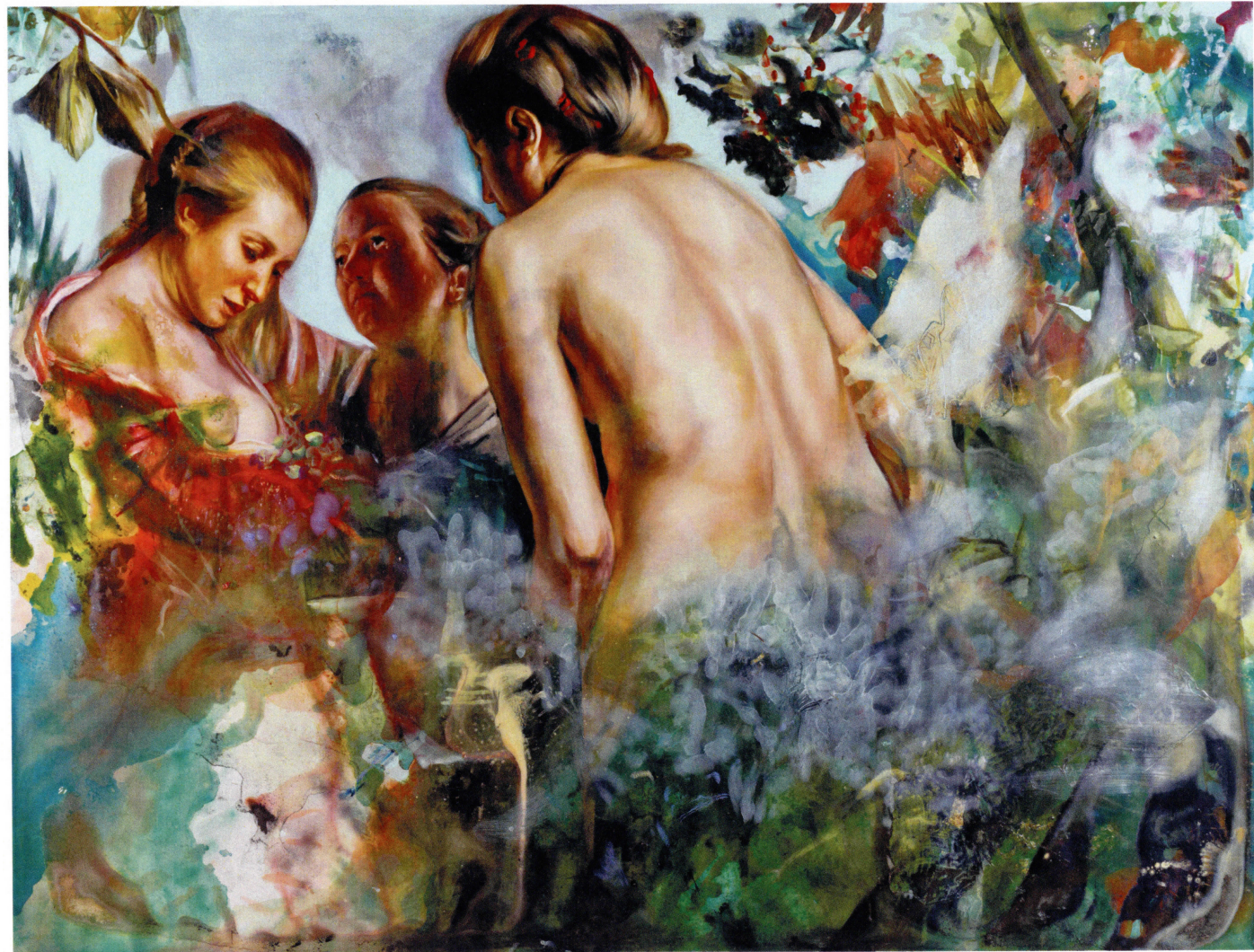


The bones of us
hunger for nothing

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Something has started to live in you that will live longer than the sun

Oil, acrylic, gouache, and synthetic resin on canvas

66 x 90"

2014



Saturn's Moons

Oil and 23kt gold leaf on linen

36 x 48"

2015



You'll see me from a trillion miles away

Oil and synthetic resin on canvas

48 x 60"

2014



These things are your becoming

Oil and 23 kt. gold leaf on canvas over panel

66 x 90"

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EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

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