



The painting *Self Portrait as a Clown* is part of the exhibition *The Looking Room* by Lorraine Simms.

PHOTOS: DANIEL ROUSSEL

Trying on different identities

Lorraine Simms looks at the way people try to mask who they are

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

People dressed up in a donkey costume, bunny ears, and wigs are just some of the images included in Montreal artist Lorraine Simms's latest exhibition, *The Looking Room*. I spoke with her last week about the nine oil paintings on display.

How did this series start?

I always work in series, and one series seems to lead me to the next. A few years ago, I stumbled over an image on the Internet of a woman who was wanted for fraud. There were four pictures of her, and I couldn't believe it was the same woman. I began a series (titled *Fugitives*) of large portraits of women wanted for fraud. These portraits were of women who were essentially masquerading and dressing up. This is also an interesting extension for women generally, because we tend to wear makeup, dress up and change our appearance. This is not only accepted, I think it is culturally imposed. It is not too much of a leap to see how I went from there to this body of work. Essentially they are the same thing: people masquerading, people wearing costumes.

Why did you call the exhibition *The Looking Room*?

The whole show is called *The Looking Room*, as it is all about this looking that goes on in the studio and this trying on.

I recognize you immediately in *Self Portrait in a Black Wig*, but not in *Self Portrait as a Clown*. Could you tell me more about that painting?

I felt a keen identification with this clown figure, who in my view is more obviously male than female. This idea of trying on identity, changing identity, masking identity, runs through all of these works. I see the clown in the same position as the painter: on-stage, performing for an audience. What is shown and how you feel inside, these two states can be really disconnected.

Do you see yourself as one of the two figures dressed up like an ass?

Yes, I see myself in there very clearly, too. The donkey costume, again, what can you pull out about the emotional state of the people within that costume? I am really looking at this idea of performing, being in front of a public, but you are an ass. Dressed as a donkey, trying to strike a cute pose with one leg over the other.

How does the painting of the two deer fit in?

Deer are cliché animals, especially in relationship to



The *Articulation of Sight (Private Encounter)*, above, and *Self Portrait in a Black Wig* (with Lauren Harris), below, are also part of *The Looking Room* exhibition.

PHOTOGRAPHER: THE GAZETTE

young girls. I included the animals, because when I started looking at the masks and costumes, I started thinking that our relationship to nature is so distant. The closest some of us, like me, get to animals is wearing a cat suit or having a picture of deer on our wall or dressing up as a donkey.

What about your technique?

In these paintings, I wanted to contrast the thick paint with the flat shapes, and I was trying to really push my use of colour. I have tended to use more tints in my paintings, so in these ones I tried to get a lot more contrast and saturated colours. I wanted the dark colours to seem infinite. To get that feeling of space, you have to layer it and glaze it; if you put the dark colour on directly it sits on the surface.

I see Lauren Harris's painting in one of the self-portraits. Which other artists do you reference in this series?

Francis Bacon, for his big flat shapes and the curves in the mirror. Have you noticed how he does that? He never has a straight edge. Félix González-Torres for his installations of strings of lights and some of the more obvious people like James Ensor, who paints masks and costumes.

The Looking Room by Lorraine Simms continues until June 27 at Galerie Division, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W, Suite 311. For more info, call 514-759-7056 or visit www.galeriedivision.com.

Two floors up from *The Looking Room*, local artist Patrick Bernatchez presents the exhibition *134340 Soon*. I spoke to gallery director Donald Browne about the exhibition, and he said many people walk into the gallery and immediately turn around and exit. Don't do this. The small touch screen attached to the



wall is playing a rough cut of his coming film *134340*. It is a twisted, hypnotic mash-up involving Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* but this time we go back to being monkeys. Perhaps the gods are giving us one more chance to evolve more intelligently?

134340 Soon by Patrick Bernatchez continues until July 11 at Galerie Donald Browne, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W, Suite 524. For more info, call 514-380-3221 or visit www.galeriedonaldbrowne.com.

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