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Claire Oswald: Cygnet

September 19 – November 7, 2020

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Cygnet*, an exhibition of paintings and collages by Claire Oswald—the artist’s first presentation at the gallery.

Claire Oswald’s work begins as meanderings in watercolor—swaths of earthy reds; pools or veins of rich, watery blues; arroyos of emerald green. She makes stacks of drawings before ripping them up and rearranging the pieces into small rectangular collages, centering them on sheets of foxed paper pulled from books of personal significance. Some of these collages become studies for larger paintings—near-perfect facsimiles made from pieces of canvas she stitches together. Oswald came to this way of artmaking as she slowly learned to balance the opposing forces within herself.

Half of Oswald’s family are surgeons; the other half are artists. After dropping pre-med, some of the first art objects she made and exhibited were photorealistic graphite drawings on shaped wooden panels—drawing/sculptures of people. They were labor-intensive and precise—surgical, perhaps—and she prided herself on being able to accurately render almost anything in graphite. But something was missing.

She made these figurative pieces for several years before her engagement to her fiancé abruptly ended. She was a planner by nature—and this turn of events upended her world. She found herself in a dark hole of despair, paralyzed by the unknown. But after spending a few weeks with her godmother, a grief counselor, Oswald had an epiphany: she could be comfortable with the discomfort. This mantra is still part of her daily practice in the studio today. Now she relishes the moment when her initial plans for an artwork go awry, when she can take a step back and let the piece determine itself. When she is watercoloring, she tries to do so unconsciously; when she cuts and rips up her drawings before collaging them, she does so randomly. Following the epiphany coaxed out by her godmother, Oswald ceded a measure of control she had never given up before—both in the studio and in life.

And so she put her studio practice on hold—knowing that hyperrealistic drawings were not what she ultimately wanted to be making—to begin a new venture with an artist friend: Hopewell Workshop. With her partner, she designed and produced handmade quilts and textiles reminiscent of paintings by Josef and Anni Albers, Agnes Martin, Blinky Palermo, and John McLaughlin. Oswald learned to sew. She outgrew her meticulous graphite likenesses, finding fields of color had more to express in more nuanced terms.

But purchase orders and design briefs took the soul out of making for Oswald, so when a friend commissioned 389 new drawings from her, she was ready for a change of pace.

Rather than returning to graphite, the project's restrictive timeline and Oswald's shifting sensibilities led her to take the first steps toward the way she works now: letting her watercolor brush roam free across the page, ripping the resulting drawings into pieces, reassembling them into collages. She loved the new work. And so despite the success of her textile business, making the collages ignited the inspiration she needed to restart her own art practice. She closed Hopewell. The joys Oswald found in making textiles commercially would eventually return to her personal practice in her sewn paintings, two of which are on view in this show. The precision of her graphite drawings, too, would resurface in her new way of working—in how accurately she can transform her small collages into paintings composed of pieces of canvas she painstakingly stitches together. And Godmother Jane remains a buoy for Oswald (previously spiritually, now in technical matters too), helping the artist in the studio with sewing her paintings.

This work is a representation of confronting the unknowable, searching and discovery, reshuffling priorities and impulses, and finding balance—between science and softer paradigms, light and darkness, time alone and with loved ones, responsibility and flâneurism, chaos and control, concave curves pushing against convex ones, earth and air and water. Claire Oswald's work is a portrait of her life and how she moves through the world: with open eyes, an open heart, curiosity, sensitivity, fearlessness, and the optimism that beauty can always be both found and made.

Claire Oswald was born in San Antonio and lives and works in Austin. She has mounted solo exhibitions at galleries in Berlin, Houston, Los Angeles, Marfa, and San Francisco. Her work has been featured in *The Last Magazine*, *New York Times*, and *Paper Magazine*.