

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Natalie Frank: Grimm Tales

March 28 – June 8, 2019

Opening reception: Thursday, March 28, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Grimm Tales*, an exhibition of drawings by Natalie Frank—the artist’s first presentation at the gallery.

Natalie Frank’s most recent drawings—feminist reinterpretations of the unsanitized Brothers Grimm fairy tales—are a continuation of the body of work she began in 2011. The new drawings in this show flesh out where the stories left off, forming the basis for *Grimm Tales*, a ballet inspired by Frank’s drawings and choreographed by Stephen Mills, which premieres at the Long Center (Austin) on March 29, 2019.

Each drawing takes as inspiration a key moment from one of the original, uncensored stories—with a particular focus on female sexuality, everyday violence, and the moral dilemmas faced by the stories’ characters. Frank was drawn to these tales because of their origin as women’s oral tales.

Her bright, saturated application of color—in pastel and gouache—dramatizes her compositions by conjuring the feel of fire, ice, acid, and blood. The drawings alternate between psychological portraits, shifting landscapes, and interior scenes stuffed with conflict or secrets. Many of Frank’s drawings are densely layered: sometimes she renders figures with a sharp and precise black outline, while the boundaries of other bodies are fuzzier, melting into nearby people or animals, trees or buildings.

Transformation is one of the Grimms’ key themes that Frank emphasizes in her drawings. Aside from depicting figures dissolving into one another, she also points to supernatural transmutation by putting beautifully rendered human eyes in unexpected places. Eyes float—disembodied—or belong to inanimate objects or animals. In the “The Frog King,” the story’s eponymous protagonist does a favor for a princess on the condition that she takes him as her companion. In Frank’s drawing of the frog, she gives him a human eye, hinting that a prince is trapped in this amphibious body (a plot point revealed only at the end of the story when he transfigures back into a prince). The central, woody character of “The Juniper Tree” (which Frank drew with three eyes hovering among its limbs), is the magical catalyst that reincarnates a beloved son into a bird (after he was decapitated by his vengeful stepmother), and once he finds justice, brings him back to life as a boy. Metamorphosis, the mutability of death, omniscient mirrors—the magic in Grimms’ stories belongs to the people.

Women were the ones who maintained and shared the oral traditions that Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm compiled into the famous fairy tales that have endured the ages. In the 18th century (and earlier), women told these stories in the kitchen, at the well, in the nursery—

creating roles and adventures for themselves that were not always allowed in the constrictive patriarchy imposed by the church and the state. At first glance, the fairy tales seem like the same old sexist stories about helpless women and their hypermasculine saviors. Frank's closer read reveals quieter complexities and contradictions: women who can be kind *and* malevolent *and* funny (depending on context), women who transgress normal social boundaries in pursuit of their own desires, women who come across as *real* (despite the fantastical creatures and phenomena of the stories they inhabit). Frank brings these narrative undercurrents to the fore in her drawings, honoring the protofeminist oral traditions that led to the stories we now know.

Frank's emphasis on the ambiguities buried within Grimms' tales, as curator Claire Gilman writes, "[allows] her to explore the human subject in a way that [feels] open-ended and therefore relevant. Where the narratives generally conclude with happy endings, her drawings exploit and inhabit the uncertainty at the stories' core....Her drawings, like the Grimms' stories themselves, are fundamentally about the struggle to make sense of the world and the individual's place in it."

Natalie Frank, born in 1980 in Austin, lives and works in New York. Her 2015 solo exhibition at the Drawing Center (New York), *Natalie Frank: The Brothers Grimm*, traveled to the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin) and the University of Kentucky Art Museum (Lexington). The exhibition was accompanied by a publication of her drawings paired with the stories that inspired them: *Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Damiani, 2015, with essays by Linda Nochlin, Claire Gilman, Julie Taymor, and fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes. Frank's work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Bowdoin College Museum of Art (Maine), Brooklyn Museum of Art, Burger Collection (Hong Kong), Kemper Art Museum (St. Louis), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (Philadelphia), Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery (New York), Weatherspoon Art Museum (North Carolina), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), and Yale University Art Museum (New Haven).