



I COULD STAY HERE AND BECOME SOMEONE BETTER

2007

oil on canvas

3'x3'

ABOUT THE WORK

In a period of art where flash and extravagance are used to incite emotions, I seek to evoke emotions and ideas through the use of overlooked everyday foods that all of us eat and to bring out their dusty splendor with a fresh bravado. Here paintings are portraits of myself exploring food in unconventional ways, where I try to wrestle with the ideas of beauty and repulsion inherent in each substance. From the childish messiness of covering myself with cake to the more sexually explicit smearing myself with honey, each painting is an investigation into different shades of repulsion and repulsion's strikingly peculiar closeness to beauty.

Each painting begins with a creative session between myself and a food – honey, milk, cake, etc. – where I forge a personal pretend environment where I play and analyze my materials. I cover myself with them, feel them and attempt with eye, hands and mind to find the neglected greatness/magnificence that resides in each of those common subjects. Everyday objects that through visual habit and quotidian routine we come to take for granted and think for granted, I take into my own personal pretend space and explore/reinvigorate.

What I've found in each substance and my connection and reaction with those substances has been specific each time: a fig's resemblance to flesh, the stickiness of honey on the body, the liquid solidity of watermelon. The importance of these childish explorations is in trying to make these common substances new to me – not visually new, but during the moments of my performance, making them feel new to me, foreign to me, cracking open their boring shells to play with their amorphous bright yokes and that experience is what I try to transmit in my paintings. To capture those sparkly moments where I can return to a safe, childish space of play which pops open creative passages that let me feel these substances in meaningful ways.

This body of works allows the viewer an entrance into the creative spaces I have forged and as avenues into the excitement and emotion that were generated there. Each work comes from a photo-documented performance, a tender moment where I am able to explore my materials with a liberating naiveté. These moments are captured in a series of photos or video and from these recordings I digest these performances to their essentials in hopes of presenting a work of art that is both accessible and engaging.



UNTITLED (WITH HONEY)

2007

oil on canvas

4' x 5'

ARTIST BIO

Born in Dalton, Georgia in 1974, Monica Cook moved to Savannah, Georgia to pursue a bachelor's degree in painting at the Savannah College of Art and Design, graduating in 1996. Cook recently completed a residency at the School of Visual Arts in NYC, where she currently resides, continuing to work as an artist.

Monica Cook has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States, France, China, Amsterdam and Tel Aviv. Her work has been included in international auctions held through Sotheby's. Her work is featured internationally in numerous private and corporate collections and is included in the issue of *New American Paintings* no. 58.

Monica Cook's paintings describe a stark, sometimes disturbing, objectivity of the figure, by heightening various textures on the body, the translucency of the flesh, how the veins surface and recede. Her paintings allude to stories exposed by history trapped inside the skin. Exaggeration of these details enhances the mortal presence of the subject and their psychological complexity, objectifying the condition of raw.



33 SUMMERS
2007
oil on canvas
3'x3'

ARTIST STATEMENT

Over a decade ago I began painting self portraits out of convenience of using myself as a model. Although the paintings are somewhat autobiographical I have rarely considered my “self portraits” a portrait of me. I try to allow the character to evolve on its own and not become trapped by expectations or likeness.

After many years of feeling confined to painting self portraits I would catch myself trying to memorize others features, like the shape of some ones hands or the color around their eyes to bring back to my portrait in the studio. Over time I had grown tired of solely painting myself and of the limited pose I had from painting from life through the mirror, so I began to use photographs as reference. Like many artists I enjoy working alone, becoming comfortable with use of a photographic reference made it possible to paint others without the distractions of having a model in the studio.

Many figurative painters would choose not to work from photographs. There are many differences than working from life, you are capturing the sitter, cropped, in one exact moment, the depth of field is blurred and light and color are flattened. With all of these difficulties I don't consider any of them as problems, in many ways they add to the piece. The photograph I begin with has a completely different life from what it becomes as a painting. It is exciting to see a photographic image translated into the language of paint, in which every move is intentional with no boundaries to reality.

Painting has always been a source of self exploration for me. Now that I am painting other people I think it is even more so. I thought it took a lot of courage to expose myself in a painting but realized it takes even more to expose someone else. Having my friends as models was extremely nerve racking at first, with self portraits you really only have yourself to answer to, painting others you have their physical concerns.

I found myself frustrated and confined by the ideas of how people want to be portrayed, in painting them, like my self portraits, they are also not meant to capture the sitter, I want the real subject to lurk behind the painted version of themselves. It is too overwhelming of a task to capture the person posing and, as the painter, it could become laborious and boring, I prefer the surprise of the unknown.

I am often carried away with the details, using the paint to describe a near-cruel, sometimes disturbing, objectivity of the figure, heightening various textures on the body, the translucency of the skin, how the veins surface and recede, the subtle sheen of the lips and slickness of the eyes.

I love to paint flesh, fascinated by how history is trapped in the skin, the stories told in lines etched into faces, bruises and scars from their past. I find myself heightening the details on and in the flesh, which enhances the mortal presence of the sitter and creates a tension between the psychological complexity of the person and their raw humanness.



UNDERTOW
2007
oil on canvas
4'x3'



RUE DES BONS ENFANTS

2007

oil on canvas

4'x5'



UNTITLED (WITH MASK)

2007

oil on canvas

4' x 5'



UNTITLED (WITH BAG)

2007

oil on canvas

4' x 5'

Bottoms Up

TAG Art Gallery Sept. 1-29

by Brittany Conner

Pee Girls

Saucy new Nashville exhibit proves once again that girls just want to have fun.

It's been a great year so far for "down there." From Oprah's va-jay-jay to Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan going Kojak, the female nether regions have rarely had it so good. Continuing in that vein—albeit with a tad more, ahem, coverage—is Monica Cook's Pee Girls, which opens this Saturday at TAG Art Gallery.

All joking aside, the exhibit's 14 realistic paintings of women urinating reveal a different (and lighter) side of an otherwise very serious artist. Cook is generally known for her large-scale portraits and murals. These are elaborate works—paintings that often feature highly detailed backgrounds of fantastic shapes and colors.

The Pee Girls paintings are simpler. They're also a hell of a lot of fun. We see women in various stages of removing their panties and, well, doing you-know-what. All are clearly enjoying themselves. And with many, the bush is back—eat your hearts out Britney and Lindsay.

Boxhead "Untitled 2 (Bike)"

Cook got the idea for Pee Girls during the recent Magical Mundane exhibit at Chicago's Bucket Rider Gallery. One of her friends was curator of the exhibit and asked her to participate.

Mundane's aim was to take the most commonplace things in daily life and re-create them as extraordinary events. For Cook, urination fit the bill. "Women rarely, if ever, pee standing up," says Cook in a recent email. "Not only is it an unusual experience, but it is somewhat empowering and liberating."

Cook found friends to serve as models for her series. She photographed them in secluded spaces (such as men's toilets), often after playful late nights on the town. You can see their fun in the paintings.

Indeed, it's hard not to laugh or smile when you view "Untitled (Kitten)." It features a urinating woman in fitted T-shirt, jeans and panties down around her ankles. A robot box is on her head and her trusty kitten at her side. In works such as "Untitled (Wet Vac)" and "Untitled (Cowgirl)," the women laugh right along with the viewer.

Whee! “Untitled 12 (Cowboy Hat)”

Pee Girls are paintings made with super-glossy, alcohol-based ink on drafting vellum. The results are so realistic they look almost like photographs. Cook, however, insists they’re not sexual. True, the subject matter is often associated with a porn fetish. But in turning the images into paintings, Cook believes she elevates her subjects, and in the process creates art.

TAG owner Jerry Dale McFadden, like the majority of Cook’s other gallery representatives, is showing her work unframed, electing simply to tape the paintings to the wall.

Cook declined to give her works titles. McFadden gave them subtitles to differentiate them. All of the works are small, measuring a mere 14-by-17 inches, which is intended to make them seem intimate, jewel-like, even vulnerable.

McFadden originally wanted to exhibit Pee Girls with some of Cook’s more traditional large-scale paintings, but demand for those works is so great he wasn’t able to obtain any. Fortunately, Cook promises an upcoming TAG exhibit featuring some of those works.

In the meantime, McFadden wants TAG viewers will keep an open mind. He definitely expects crowd reactions. Most, he hopes, will be positive.

“These fun and whimsical works are sure to entertain and possibly catch some folks off guard,” he says.



UNTITLED (WITH PUMPKIN)

2007

oil on canvas

5' x 5'



TO SEE
2007
oil on canvas
3'x3'



UNTITLED
2007
ink on vellum
14"x18"
private collection

ABOUT THE WORK

I began the series a few months ago when a friend of mine was curating a show called the Magical Mundane at Bucket Rider Gallery in Chicago. The work for the exhibition was to show common things in an uncommon way, ordinary made extraordinary. So I took one of the most ordinary things, to pee, and found new and exciting ways to do it. Women rarely, if ever, pee standing up, not only is it an unusual experience but it is some what empowering and liberating, which is why I have only painted women peeing. I found friends who were willing to model for me, sometimes after late nights on the town, others during the day, on rooftops, in secluded streets or in men's public toilets. The experience of capturing the photo is very intimate and somewhat absurd. The photo captures the awkwardness of the activity and the childlike giddiness and liberation of such an experience. Painting the imagery removes some of its rawness making it more accessible to the viewer. The ink I chose to use has a translucent, high gloss finish that is amplified against the matteness of the vellum. The vellum adds a seemingly fragile quality and simplicity to the piece, which speaks of the vulnerability and raw humanness of the moment captured. Painted small they become intimate and jewel-like, hopefully carrying out the energy of such a personal shared experience with the artist and model.

UNTITLED
2007
ink on vellum
14"x18"
private collection



below
UNTITLED
2007
ink on vellum
14"x18"
private collection

opposite page
UNTITLED
2007
ink on vellum
14"x18"
private collection





UNTITLED
2007
ink on vellum
14"x18"
private collection



MONICA COOK

EDUCATION:

- 2004 School of Visual Arts, Studio Residency Program
- 1996 Savannah College of Art and Design, Suma Cum Laude, BFA
- 1995 Savannah College of Art and Design off campus program, New York study
- 1992 Savannah College of Art and Design, Rising Star
- 1992 University of Tennessee, figure drawing

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2007 Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2007 "Undiscovered Country", TAG Gallery, Nashville, TN
- 2005 "Migration", Pinnacle, Savannah, GA
- 2004 Icovozzi Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2003 Recent Works with the Savannah Symphony, Civic Center, Savannah, GA
- 2000 "B-I-N-G-O", Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2000 "Admit One", Metropole, Savannah, GA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2007 Year07, Marcia Wood Gallery, London
- 2007 "Magical Mundane", Bucket Rider Gallery, Chicago
- 2007 Moti Hasson Gallery, New York, Scope, Switzerland
- 2005 "Square Foot", AWOL Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2005 Whitney Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2005 "Cityscapes", Sarah Bain Gallery, Brea, CA
- 2005 "Plait", Platform Gallery, Tuscan, AZ
- 2004 "By Myself", Swan Coach House Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2004 The Telfair Ball, Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, GA
- 2002-2003 Sapphire, Savannah, GA
- 2002-2003 Gallery 360, Savannah, GA
- 2002 Art Installation Symposium, Starland, Savannah, GA
- 2002 Art Link, Sotheby's, Tel Aviv, Israel
- 2002 Art Link, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York, NY
- 2002 Art Link, Sotheby's, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2001 "12", Tallialoo Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2001 "Catalyst", Gallery 28, Savannah, GA
- 2001 "Annual Drawing Exhibition", Gallery 28, Savannah, GA
- 2000 "Savannah Artists", Chateau Élan, Atlanta, GA
- 2000 Lotus Gallery, Bay City, TX
- 1999 "Red Threads", Eye Drum, Atlanta, GA
- 1998 "Red Threads", Loft Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 1997 "Catalyst Collaborative", Gallery 28, Rapid Transit Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 1999 Bergen Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 1995 "Phylum", Rapid Transit Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 1992 Hunter Museum, Chattanooga, TN

JURIED EXHIBITIONS:

- 2007 7th Biennial, Air Gallery, New York
- 2006 "Icarus", Savannah Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2005 King Bridge Biennial, Columbus Museum, Columbus, GA
- 2004 "Sense of Otherness", Pinnacle Gallery, Savannah, GA and Savannah Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2003 "Purr-fect", Pinnacle Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2003 "Pour L' Amour", Mona Bismark Foundation, Paris , France
- 2003 "Red On Red", Red Gallery, Savannah, GA and Savannah Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2003 "Dog Days", Broom Street Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002 "Oh Baby", Alexander Gallery, Savannah, GA
- 2001 Ann Arbor Street Fine Art Fair, Ann Arbor, MI
- 2001 Art Link, International auctions held through Sotheby's, Tel Aviv, New York, Amsterdam
- 1999-2000 "Transcending Limits", Texas Fine Arts Association, State wide tour:
- 2000 Abraham Gallery, Plainview, TX
- 2000 Bath House Cultural Center, Dallas, TX
- 2000 The Jones Center for Contemporary Art, Austin, TX
- 1999 Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX
- 1999 Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, TX
- 1999 Creative Arts Guild, Dalton, GA
- 1998 Arts on the River, Savannah, GA

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS:

- Mrs. Candice Stipe, Kingsport, TN
- Mr. and Mrs. George Spence, Dalton, GA
- Mr. Howard Fulfrost, Los Angeles, CA
- Mr. and Mrs. Clark Voss, Savannah, GA
- Ms. Tara Traux and Mr. Tom Boula, Ypsilanti, MI
- Mr. Kevin Box, Austin, TX
- Ms. Martina Grenier and Mr. Matt Nabozny, Gregory, MI
- Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lamb, Savannah, GA
- Mrs. Helen McKee, Northville, MI
- Ms. Robin Richard and Ms. Tisha Moore, Ypsilanti, MI
- Ms. Shannon Parris, Redding, PA
- Mr. and Mrs. Mark Mackey, Hilton Head Island, SC
- Ms. Jodi Brownstein, Deerfield, IL
- Mr. and Mrs. Seth Vandable, Cedar Hill, TX
- Mr. Brian Swier, Birmingham, AL
- Mr. Alan Lorberbaum, Boca Raton, FL
- Ms. Marcella Slade, Barcelona, Spain
- Mr. Serge J. H. Gijrath, Amsterdam, ND
- Ms. Amy Spurlock, Las Vegas, NM

CORPORATE COLLECTIONS:

Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, GA
EM Industries, Savannah, GA
Savannah Plastic Surgery, Savannah, GA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2007, Guest Artist in printmaking, Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta, GA
2004, Guest Lecture, Armstrong Atlantic State University
2004, Guest Lecture, The Landings Art Association
1994-2003, freelance artist
1998-1999, Chatham County Public Schools, Special Education substitute teacher
1998, Summer Therapeutic Enrichment Program, Savannah, GA
1996, Savannah College of Art and Design, Art Therapy
1996, Savannah College of Art and Design, mentor, painting
1994, Savannah College of Art and Design, tutor, drawing and painting

PUBLICATIONS:

2007 "Girls, Girls, Girls", Art in America, June/July
2007 Tokeon Magazine, March
2006 "New York Artist Backstage", by Michiko Rico Nose
2005 New American Paintings, Juried Exhibition-in Print Number 58
2005 "Savannah's Best", voted best local artist, Connect Savannah
2005 "Cook's Creative Migration continues", Savannah Morning News
2004-07 Art in America, Annual guide to artist and galleries
2004 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, AJC Access Atlanta
2004 "A look within reveals truths about us all", The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
2004 "Laid Bare on Canvas", Jezebel Magazine
2004 "Women Behaving Boldly", Creative Loafing, Atlanta, GA
2004 Artist profile, Deep Magazine
2004 "It's a small world after all", Creative Loafing, Atlanta, GA
2002 "Pour L' Amour", Elle, Le Point, Paris-Match, Le Figaro, Le Journal du Dimanche
2002 (cover) The Magazine, Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, GA
2001 Atlanta Magazine, Atlanta, GA
2001 Savannah College of Art and Design Catalog
2001 "A Catalyst for Change", Savannah Morning News, Savannah, GA
2001 "Art-Like Life", The Chronicle, Savannah, GA
2001 "Gallery 28's Catalyst Reflects Collective Inspiration", Creative Loafing
2000 "Mind Games", Savannah Morning News, Savannah, GA
2000 "Dark and Playful Circus Portraits", Connect, Savannah, GA