

Roman Road

| Working Project

TWO SISTERS

Private View: Tuesday 31 May 2022, 6 – 9 PM

Exhibition: Wednesday 01 June – Thursday 30 June 2022

Opening Hours: Wednesday – Friday, 10 AM – 6 PM; Saturday
12 PM – 5 PM and by appointment

Address: Working Project, 50 Golborne Road, London W10 5PR

Roman Road is extremely pleased to present *Two Sisters*, a group show exploring the themes of vision, connectivity and resilience at Working Project, Notting Hill. It brings together works by Daisy Dodd-Noble, Michael Dohr, Ariane Heloise Hughes, Yulia Iosilzon, Jack Laver, Alix Marie, Anousha Payne, Rebekah Rubalcava, Elsa Rouy and Anna Skladmann.

Two Sisters takes its title from Giorgio de Chirico's eponymous painting from 1915 which represents two faceless mannequin heads whose absent eyes are signified through the motifs of a line and of open black holes resembling doors, or perhaps portals. A seminal work by de Chirico, this painting illustrates the artist's desire to manifest what lies eternally behind 'the inexorable screen that is matter' as he called it. In the face of the First World War and the Spanish Flu pandemic, de Chirico conjured another world in which the ambiguity of symbols and "the solitude of signs", de-alienated from logical meaning, allowed for poetic forces and new meanings to emerge.

Central to de Chirico's art and that of the Surrealist movement, the motif of the eye was subjected to violent assaults – blinded, enucleated, or mutilated. From Luis Buñuel's film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), with its iconic opening scene of a razor blade slicing through a woman's eye, to Man Ray's *Indestructible object* (1933) with an eye cut from a photograph of his lover of three years who had just left him - photographer and model Lee Miller - mounted on a metronome, or Georges Bataille pornographic short novel *Histoire de l'Oeil* (Story of the Eye). This obsessive fascination with the termination of vision came with the idea that blindness enabled a new absolute kind of vision liberated from

reality. It is also the product of the Surrealists' response to the experience of war and its reaction against the very system that led to the world wars.

Surrealist techniques liberate the imagination and offer promises of freedom for artists with a desire to dissolve the frontier between visibility and invisibility, inner and outer worlds. Symbols, myths, dreams, and magic infuse the work of the artists presented in *Two Sisters* who each in their own way address phenomena of transformation, transfiguration and transmutation.

The reference to the eye was of particular importance for the elaboration of the exhibition *Two Sisters*. Indeed, one of the most vulnerable part of the body, the eye remains also one of the main portal to the world, to others. It is the site of constant attacks for it is the door to capture, steal, manipulate one's attention in a world dominated by visual information. Yet, it is also the site of vision, of creation and connection through the transformative power of imagination. *Two Sisters* invokes the multiplicity of vision and 'the eye of the imagination' as described by Oxford philosopher and esoteric Neoplatonist Robert Fludd.

Exploring the ways in which vision, connectivity and resilience interact, the exhibition is organised into groupings which are not intended as strict categories, but rather as ways of looking at motifs, networks of relations and questions that relate to the themes : from an engagement with organisms and the body, when these are confronted and surrounded by increasingly technology-controlled environments, and explorations of bodies subjected to visual assaults; through to explorations of mythologies, and the development of abstract shapes and forms to evoke organic and subterranean movements invisible to the naked eye ; to dreamscapes inhabited by anthropomorphic figures; or to monuments to nature, its invisible powers, networks and resilience in the face of adversity.

The exhibition is curated by Marisa Bellani, Creative director at Roman Road and will be complemented by an essay written by art historian, Ines de Bordas who further researches the topic approached in this show.

Two Sisters opens on Tuesday 31 May 2022 and will be on display at Working Project, Notting Hill, until Thursday 30 June 2022. For any information, please email info@romanroad.com.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alix Marie has developed a practice of photography that morphs into sculpture. Often working with images of the body, she expands the fields of vision associated with fixed images into a sculptural and immersive field. In *Styx* (2021), Marie uses large cyanotypes made from abdominal x-ray images printed onto fabric to form a labyrinthine installation. Floating in the exhibition space, the shapes of the cyanotypes become near abstraction and yet it is possible to recognise familiar forms – the outline of a spine, of the intestine. This uncertainty prompts the viewer to ask himself what am I looking at? These images are a challenge, and their status is ambiguous. Although hardly recognisable, they are encoded with our knowledge, or perhaps intuition, of the body. In classical Greek mythology, Styx is a water goddess and a river that symbolises the boundary between the Earth and the Afterlife. In her installation, Marie investigates what it means to be made of flesh, and how that consciousness of “being a body” can be made visible.

Abstract, hybrid and ambiguous, Jack Laver’s works can be seen as attempts to look under the skin of the visible and to probe organic and subterranean movements invisible to the naked eye. If his experimentations with inks and adhesives can at times remind us of painting, or photography, they also belong to their very own category. Veins, roots, structures, canals, streams, pipes, tunnels, macroscopic and microscopic visions – all of these are possibilities contained within Laver’s work. They remind us of the world of forms that exist beneath the surface of things: the magic of matter. Each composition reveals unexpected colours, waves and folds that beg the question: are these natural or unnatural landscapes?

Anousha Payne's painted compositions display organic forms that are both entangled and encompassing. These ambiguous forms, which seem to belong to the natural and vegetal world, have a life of their own. They are set in motion and are reaching out to the viewer who in turn becomes entangled in them. Payne takes her inspiration from Indian folk tales and the ways in which some stories bring together moral dilemmas, magic, animism and transfiguration. In some of her compositions, movement is combined with hand gestures borrowed from the classical south Indian dance form, Bharathatyam. Each gesture has a symbolic value and an assigned meaning. The idea that inanimate objects possess souls, which defines animism, takes on a new pictorial dimension in Payne's work.

Elsa Rouy's work explores the materiality of the body. At once haunting and ambiguous, her compositions investigate the substance of the physical form and different notions connected to bodily realities – dependency, vulnerability, abjection. Although clearly outlined in their contours, the bodies are often depicted dissolving into surroundings, and into each other. Boundaries between inside and outside are constantly challenged, and at times, it seems like these androgynous bodies become mere vessels. Bodily fluids are depicted in great detail, connecting bodies in circulation. Rouy charges her compositions with eroticism and humour and investigates relationships between bodies, points of connections, of entries, ultimately prompting the viewer to interrogate the boundary of the self.

Ariane Heloise Hughes' striking oil paintings present unsettling scenes that oscillate between beautiful and disquiet, familiar and uncanny. She takes her inspiration from mundane compositions found on Instagram as much as from art historical references. The elaborate settings she paints, rich with allegorical symbols, are the backdrop for an exploration of duality and of the subject/

object dynamic. The female nude is a recurrent motif in Hughes's work as she explores modes of representation of the feminine body and of desire to instigate an ironical commentary on today's culture of voyeurism and the perpetuation of idealised online self-representation. She uses traditional artistic techniques to re-engage her audience in the act of looking, inviting us to reflect on the passive consumption of images in our digital world today.

Michael Dohr's enigmatic painterly compositions and structures are rich with symbolism drawn from both the natural world and the industrialized society that surrounds us. Connected to notions of transformation and transition, his work functions as a reminder of the complex ecosystem we are a part of and the elaborate ways in which nature and technology are interconnected. Visually, this occurs both technically and formally. Using silicone casting molds to signify the organic appearance of things as well as replication mechanisms, Dohr invites us to think of the multiplicity of structures and to expand our field of knowledge of living organisms. His paintings, in line with his sculptural practice, reflect both the artist's gesture and a symbolism connected to the ways our modes of vision are increasingly impacted by technology and digital landscapes.

With a unique style combining abstract and figurative elements, Daisy Dodd-Noble paints imaginary landscapes populated by plants and trees of different shapes, colours and sizes. Placed like totems within colourful and bright compositions, they seem to be endowed with a certain levity, a sense of lightness associated with dreams or expanded consciousness. Dodd-Noble's vibrant hues glow with vitality, like energy fields and one cannot help wondering whether her work depicts imaginary locations or emotional state of minds. Either way, each painting takes us to a world where the life of plants takes over and, in our times of environmental crisis, reminds us of the sacred and vital role plants and trees play: they produce the atmosphere that surrounds us and are the origin of

the oxygen that animates us.

In Yulia Iosilzon's dreamscapes, languid figures seem to drift across the surface of the paintings. Her vibrant and lyrical compositions are populated by imaginary creatures, species of plants like the ones seen in fairy tales, and anthropomorphic figures. The swift brushstrokes and spiralling movements animate the space and infuse this imaginary world with motion. In Iosilzon's curvy, wavy and almost collapsing visions, the different layers of the pictorial plane seem to dissolve into one. Loosely brushed figures intersect and seep into one another. In some form of time-collapse too, like in dreams, some figures and shapes seem to re-appear on different parts of the canvas.

Anna Skladmann devised a technique which combines the use of liquids such as milk or water and of a high-definition digital scanner to produce images of flowers and plants. The former is evocative of traditional photographic printing techniques whilst the latter reflects a desire to explore new ways of recording nature. The resulting images are both elaborate and dreamlike as one can get lost in the detail, the nuances of colours, the varied textures and the unruly, rhythmic forms of vegetal structures. It calls into question how plant forms are arranged for the viewer by human hands, or not. These pictures portray nature invading the pictorial space and yet we cannot see their roots or soil, neither can we understand what environment they belong to due to the lack of perspective. They're staged visions of natural forms bound to fade and transformed into tableaux.

In her paintings, Rebekah Rubalcava visually translates fragments of her dreams, spiritual experiences and emotional responses to being in the world. Figurative fantasies and everyday realism merge into scenes that waver between her inner world and her

processing of external influences. References to films, fashion, conspiracy theories or literature can be seen in her compositions; and she also draws inspiration from the surrealist worlds rich with symbolism of artists such as Frida Khalo, Hieronymus Bosch or Edvard Munch. The imbrication of dreamscapes, figures or forms drawn from life and surreal effects create the possibility of a co-existence, or co-habitation, of multiple temporalities in a single composition - almost in cinematographic terms. Reminiscences of her childhood spent in a religious household in America, eroticism and sexuality permeate the intricate and enigmatic narratives Rubalcava depicts.

ABOUT ROMAN ROAD

Roman Road is a contemporary art gallery based in London and founded by Marisa Bellani. The gallery has recently redefined itself with a more fluid and ethical approach, becoming a platform for collaborative exhibitions in 2019. Since 2020, Marisa has organised art residencies in London as part of the gallery activities. Roman Road exists since 2013, following and fostering notable projects and dealing with artists all over the world. Since completing a full renovation in 2015, Roman Road has established a qualitative programme and has seen its represented artists become internationally recognised by institutions and collectors. Roman Road has established a qualitative and thematic programme and realised the creation of a research cell and Roman Road Journal in 2018, an online platform dedicated to publishing articles and exploring topics on art, science, technology, anthropology and literature.

ABOUT WORKING PROJECT

Working Project seeks to explore the potential of ephemeral spaces, providing flexible solutions and opportunities for London creatives. Based in West London, their initiatives include, but are not limited to events, exhibitions, artist residencies and studio spaces.

Web: www.working-project.com

Instagram: [@workingproject.workingproject](https://www.instagram.com/workingproject.workingproject)