

## THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE 22 June - 20 July 2023

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Olha Pryymak  
Florence Reekie  
Elena Rivera-Montanes  
Grace Tobin  
Xu Yang

STUDIO WEST is proud to present *The Angel in the House*, a group exhibition featuring seven emerging UK-based female painters. Taking John Everett Millais' intricate painting *The Bridesmaid* (1851) as its starting point, the exhibition seeks to ignite a transhistorical discussion centring around notions of femininity in the context of domestic space.

Held in the Fitzwilliam Collection in Cambridge, England, Millais' *The Bridesmaid* is an unassuming yet richly symbolic piece. Hidden beneath its entrancing beauty, the diminutive portrait conceals a nuanced condemnation of the confines placed on women's existence in the 19th century. The central figure, a redheaded young woman, is pictured with apprehension in her eyes as she performs a folkloric ritual on St Agnes' Eve: while passing a piece of wedding cake through a ring nine times, her future husband appears before her and she is presented with the very man who will shortly steal her innocence.

More than a portrait, the painting is an allegory. Millais deliberately juxtaposes symbols of chastity and innocence with signifiers of sensuality and sexual awakening - an ornate orange blossom corsage contrasts with an obtusely phallic sugar shaker which disrupts an otherwise balanced composition. In doing so, the piece complicates the then prevalent conceptualisation of women as either pious and passive wives or sinful charlatans and wanton seductresses. The former archetype is best typified by the Victorian expression 'the angel in the house'; a phrase used to signify a saintly, silenced and submissive wife whose sole purpose was to exhibit absolute devotion to her husband. Instead, in *The Bridesmaid* we find a creature of agency - with feelings, fears, and desires of her own - who stands between these binaries and in opposition to the path that is being forcibly laid before her.

Drawing its title from this same phrase, this group exhibition gently unravels ribbons of thought invoked by *The Bridesmaid*. In exploring contemporary scenes of domestic life, the works on show question and complicate reductive understandings of femininity and bring to light the many facets of these women artists' lived experiences and inner-worlds. Neither rejecting nor wholly embracing traditions associated with the feminine, the artworks on show reapproach the relationship between women and domestic space while revisiting age-old signifiers of femininity in a new light. Seemingly unconnected objects – flowing silks, clambering weeds, bejewelled brooches and polished jugs – become symbols of the artists' deep-felt connections with their homes and of the formation of their identities. Meanwhile, painterly renderings of intimate space become the stage upon which the exhibition plays out a reimagining of 'the angel in the house' for the 21st century.

## ABOUT STUDIO WEST

STUDIO WEST is an art gallery in Notting Hill founded in 2021 by curator Caroline Boseley. Its annual exhibition and events programme features the work of the UK's most exciting emerging and newly established artists. It endeavours to fully support the artists it works with through mentorship, hosting opportunities, network building and knowledge sharing, nurturing their growth and helping them to build sustained professional careers without requiring exclusive representation. For collectors, it offers the opportunity to learn more about London's vibrant emerging art scene and purchase artwork made by incredibly promising talents.

Since inception, STUDIO WEST's values have remained the same. It aims to engage fully and authentically with the local community, create a comfortable and welcoming space for all visitors, encourage investment in contemporary art created by emerging and newly established artists and, most importantly, always prioritise the needs of the artists' it works with.

The gallery opened in November 2021 with a duo show by Victoria Cantons and Xu Yang and has since hosted multiple group exhibitions, including 'The Reality in Whytch You Create', 'Fancy a Bite?', 'GROUNDWORK' and 'SKIN DEEP', and two solo shows with Karolina Albricht and Lydia Makin respectively. The gallery runs an annual Open Call Exhibition and Art Prize titled 'NOW Introducing' that invites applications from any artist currently studying on or recently graduated from a London based BA, MA or alternative study programme.

STUDIO WEST

216 KENSINGTON PARK RD, LONDON, W11 1NR

STUDIO WEST is becoming known for thoughtful concept-driven exhibitions, authentic community engagement, and offering comprehensive support to London's emerging artists.

STUDIO WEST

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