

Nicola Tyson
A Tendency to Flock

23 June – 2 September 2017
1 Davies Street W1
Tuesday – Saturday, 6 – 8 pm

Nicola Tyson's 2017 exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ features a group of seven new paintings, embracing a range of subjects and scales. Tyson, who has been based in New York since 1989, is primarily known as a painter but has also worked with photography film, performance and the written word. Her work has continued to gain recognition for its reimagining of the female figure in relation to concepts of identity and the social gaze. She sets out to describe the female body as experienced rather than merely observed. Moving beyond a mimetic, objectifying approach, she explores the body as a constantly shifting set of felt coordinates. Through this process, her distinctive images often blur the distinction between representation and abstraction.



Adopting an intuitive approach, Tyson begins by drawing. She works quickly to “stay ahead of rational decision making”, not knowing what will appear but trusting that the “discovered” images will resonate with a complex range of meanings and associations. Selected sketches are then worked up into paintings through a slower, more deliberate process. Tyson's expressive paint application is nevertheless characterised by a ‘one-chance only’ approach – that of using a dry brush to produce a sense of immediacy and dynamism of movement, in addition to her chromatically-heightened palette of unlikely colour combinations, alternately perverse and beautiful.

Tyson draws influence from artists such as Bellmer, Bacon, Bourgeois and sources beyond, reformulating these precursors in the pursuit of an independent and idiosyncratic visual language. Her approach to her medium, and to the genre of figuration, has been compared with that of the pioneering Austrian painter, Maria Lassnig (1919-2014), who coined the terms *Körpergefühl* (body sensation) and *Körperbewusstsein* (body awareness) to describe her own approach. These twin concepts aptly reflect the combination of physicality and introspection which informs Tyson's work. Her ambivalence about titling her works (often preferring numbers or minimal annotations) reflects her reluctance to guide the viewer towards any specific reading. She has stated: “for me, a successful drawing or painting is one that I don't recognise... that surprises *me*”. Accordingly, the title of the exhibition — *A Tendency to Flock* — references nothing specific, save an urge to gather together. Like the paintings, the title elicits a gentle yet absurd humour.

In previous works, Tyson's figures have been depicted with a coloured ground as their sole context, or occasionally find themselves positioned within some kind of landscape. In the new body of works (all 2017), the figures — or creatures — are engaged, indeed immersed, in an intense relationship with their surroundings. The paintings' titles offer further clue: in *Nectar*, an airborne insect-like creature dips a long proboscis into the centre of a bloom. In *Flyover* a winged figure — viewed from above — hovers over a patchwork landscape of fields and in *Jump* a figure huddles on the back of a leaping horse. Tyson has also continued her investigations in self-portraiture, three examples of which are included in this show.

Nicola Tyson (b. 1960, London), has exhibited internationally. In autumn 2017, she will present a solo exhibition of works on paper, *Beyond a Trace*, at The Drawing Room, London. Earlier this year, she presented a survey exhibition at The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, USA. Recent solo exhibitions have taken place at Petzel Gallery, New York (2016), which included the catalogue *Nicola Tyson Works on paper*, Nathalie Obadia Gallery, Paris (2015); and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles, (2014). Her 2012 exhibition *Bowie Nights at Billy's Club, London, 1978*, White Columns, New York (which travelled to Sadie Coles HQ, London in 2013), comprised an archive of compelling and evocative photographs documenting the London club scene of the late 1970s. Recent group exhibitions include *Living Dangerously* at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, Ohio; *Belief + Doubt: Selections from the Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz Collection*, NSU Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, (2016) and *Portrait*; Skarstedt Gallery, New York (2016); *The Marked Self: Self-Portraits between Annihilation and Masquerade*, Neue Galerie Graz, Austria (2015); *The Naked*, Drawing Room (2014). In 2013 she also published *Dead Letter Men* - a new book composed of a series of satirical letters to dead artists, with its roots in a performance piece in New York. Her work is held in various prestigious public collections internationally including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Metropolitan Museum, New York, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C, and Tate Modern, London.

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