## NINO MIER GALLERY

SLEEK Magazine Rebecca O'Dwyer: Incoming Artist Louise Bonnet June 2019

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# LOUISE BONNET

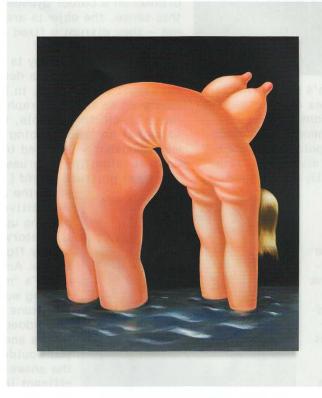
THE SWISS ARTIST WHO SWAPPED GENEVA FOR LA IN THE NINETIES TO PAINT THE VISCERAL WEIRDNESS OF THE HUMAN BODY

Text by Rebecca O'Dwyer

"I am interested in the body," says Los Angeles-based, Swiss artist Louise Bonnet, "in what having a body feels like, the way it does its own thing ... how we try to hide what it shows, to contain it, how it inspires shame because we cannot control it." As her first solo exhibition in Germany last Autumn at the Berlin outpost of Galerie Max Hetzler demonstrated, Bonnet's funny, uneasy paintings, typically stretching beyond

human scale, call to mind the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico and Philip Guston, along with the work of American comicbook artist Robert 'R.' Crumb. Faceless, ambiguous bodies languish or contort in flat dreamlike spaces, while body parts - a nipple here, a finger there are jumbled up, or inflated to grotesque dimensions. In her oil paintings and drawings, Bonnet's bodies are always unruly,

take a year off following her graduation from the Haute École d'Art et de Design in Geneva (HEAD), she ended up moving to LA in 1994. Captivated by the city's warm and non-judgemental atmosphere in contrast to Switzerland (where, as she put it, it felt like "I had to get a PhD in art history, if I wanted to be a painter and taken seriously"), along with its renowned and newly hip art scene, the city quickly came to



feel like home. In following years, she worked chiefly as a graphic designer and illustrator at X-Large and X-Girl, a skater clothing brand, before building up a portfolio of her own work, creating larger acrylic paintings on paper. Now, she says, "I really feel completely free here."

The artist says she first began experimenting with oil paint in 2013, following a series of solo and two-person shows in LA and Tokyo. A more forgiving and flexible medium, she describes this as a transformative moment in her practice. "It really was as if I had been trying to

testing out space in improbable and often disturbing ways.

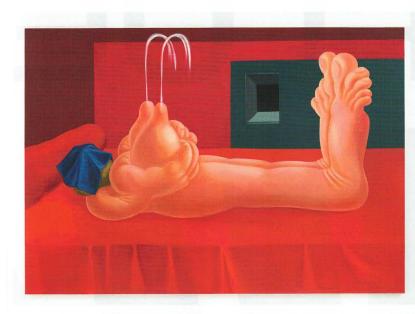
The 49-year-old's arrival on the contemporary art scene has been an impressive and meandering journey. Intending to make oil paintings my whole life," she says, just "with the wrong tools." Still, painting continues to be a challenge for Bonnet, who describes her process in visceral, almost combative terms: "A couple days in, I feel

BEGINNINGS

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like I am on the verge of the greatest work I've ever done, and it's pretty much all downhill from there until the last couple of hours where it finally, finally comes together. It's pretty draining, but I feel we make peace at the very end." Nonetheless, recent years have been productive. This summer she will feature in *Some Trees*, a group show at Nino Mier Gallery in LA, curated by the German art historian Christian Malycha. Following this, she will have her first solo exhibition at Max Hetzler's London gallery in January 2020. Other things are in the works, too, but Bonnet is tightlipped. It's "all very exciting" she says, intriguingly.

One aspect she admires about her home country, however, is its serious consideration of comic strips, and she lists the work of Crumb, Charles Burns, Chris Ware, George Herriman and Frederick Bean 'Tex' Avery as decisive influences on her work. Elsewhere, Bonnet also cites as inspiration the deadly glamour of Hitchcock, Medieval devotional paintings, the fury of Nirvana's music, as well as the work of artists Louise Bourgeois, John Currin, Carroll Dunham, Cindy Sherman and Kara Walker. The artist finds the presence of "perfectly executed rage" especially seductive, too. Uniting all of these reference points, she says, is "something dangerous underneath ... dealt with in a deflecting, even funny way" - words that could certainly describe the Swiss painter's work, as well.

Bonnet's paintings show the profound weirdness of the human body, along with the great lengths we often go to in softening its primal and even dangerous effects. This particularly applies to women, whose bodies, Bonnet rightly points out, "do such strange, magical stuff all on their own." In her 2018 painting The Witch's Room (after l'Histoire de Merlin), by contrast, the female body is in revolt. With a blue cloth tossed over what might be a head, the

truncated body is now just gargantuan feet running into knotty, oversized nipples, spurting milk like a two-pronged ornamental fountain. Exaggerated and scrambled up, Bonnet's bodies show us the powerful absurdity that is always there, even when covered up or obscured. As she says, "Cary Grant is encased in a perfectly cut threepiece Prince de Galles suit, but you have to remember that there are hairy testicles in there swaying on their own."

