

Press release

September 12th
October 24th, 2020

opening
Saturday, September 12th
from 11am to 9pm

Black Swan Oli Epp

Semiose is delighted to exhibit works by Oli Epp for the second time. Specially conceived to adorn the three walls of the Project Room, this series entitled “Black Swan” is inspired by personal and contemporary preoccupations, bringing together touching anecdotes and current theories through the medium of painting.

How did the idea of the swan motif come about?

I came across a newspaper article about a mother swan that died of a broken heart. A group of young vandals had attacked her and her partner’s nest, throwing rocks and bricks, breaking her unhatched eggs. Swans are known to mate for life, however her male partner was so distressed by the event that he was driven away. The female swan, having seen her eggs destroyed and her partner leave her, was found dead in her nest on 20th May 2020.

This story made me think a lot about love, intimacy and heartbreak and how this extends beyond humanity, affecting everything.

Furthermore, the black swan is a metaphor for foreboding, anxiety about an unexpected event with catastrophic results as stated by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2008). We are living through a Black Swan moment right now. The impact of coronavirus has irrevocably changed our world as we continue to navigate the chaos it has wreaked and lockdown slowly begins to lift. These paintings are symbols of this moment.

With a curtain as a backdrop, their theatrical staging suggests an event that is not real, a drama, too surreal to be true, which is how life currently feels. This Black Swan event has taken center stage, with everything else in the world put on hold and pushed into the wings.

The series is made up of three paintings. How do they relate to each other?

The series functions as a crescendo: the black swan mutates from a single bird into a two and three-headed monster as the spectator moves from one painting to the next. In *Shield*, the single swan guards her white egg. She faces the viewer head on, wings up, ready to defend and attack. In *Omen*, the three-headed swan has a domineering quality and truly encapsulates the strange monstrosity of a hybrid animal. The shards of green glass encircling the swan’s feet give the impression that it’s taking part in some kind of ritual; a ceremonial dance or an act of worship. This particular painting is the most successful in conveying the idea of a foreshadowing event / the Black Swan theory.

Why the recurring curtain backdrop in your paintings?

I like the idea of staging the animals / figures theatrically. It is a means of lending them greater focus and placing them at the center of attention. It also suggests an event that has been dramatized or is not real. My work already navigates this hyper-realized space, where events happening within the paintings

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navigates this hyper-realized space, where events happening within the paintings feel surreal or absurd. The use of the curtain as a backdrop further enhances that.

Why this change in direction from humans to animals?

I felt I had spent a lot of time developing my figurative work and I was ready to work on a new series that didn't feature elements considered as hallmarks of my style, such as humanoid figures and brand logos. It presented a new challenge to think about how animals would inhabit a virtual, painted space and how nature can be reformatted into my digital post-internet pop aesthetic, how my visual language would alter the forms of the animals, their color etc. This is how I found myself creating these strange hybrid animals: taking the known and bringing them into the unknown of painting.