

Allison Katz | Mélanie Matranga | Erika Verzutti

21 May 2021 – 31 Oct 2021

Nottingham Contemporary presents exhibitions by three artists. For each of the artists, it is their first solo exhibition in the UK, and features new work. All the artists play with space and language, making the familiar unfamiliar through different media – painting, sculpture, film and installation - to present their observations of the ambiguity and messiness of everyday life, which we can all relate to.

Gallery 1

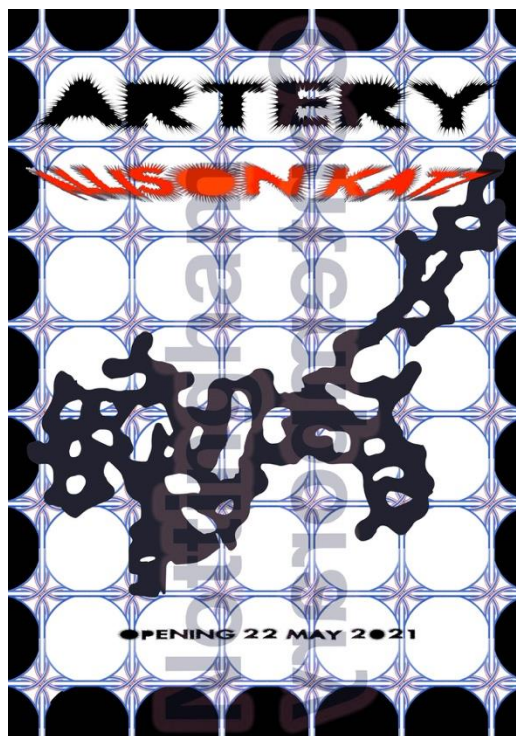
Allison Katz: Artery

Canadian artist Allison Katz' paintings use recurring images – cockerels, monkeys and cabbages, among other things, that are by turns familiar and puzzling, showing her sense of humour and curiosity. Allison's paintings are like visual puns, making jokes by putting unlikely images together or playing with words and their multiple meanings. For instance, how many cats (Katz) can you find in the paintings? What these multi-layered works reveal is her search of what the artist has called "genuine ambiguity".

Allison Katz has chosen 'Artery' as the title for her exhibition. For her the word has lots of meanings. Arteries are the blood vessels that carry oxygen from the heart to the rest of the body. Arteries are inside us (with the word "art" inside "artery"), but they also connect us: "arterial" is used to describe major roads, underground cables, rail networks and river systems.

Allison has made several designs for posters for the exhibition. She likes to be in control of everything that represents her work. She has used the pattern of a complex road junction (like Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham) as the background of one of the posters. She has overlaid this with a more random pattern from a map of the Nottingham caves. Her grandmother was evacuated to Nottingham in WWII and this map is of the caves under her grandmother's house. The caves are also under the gallery building. There are also five posters on display in City of Caves.

An underlying theme to Allison's exhibition is these networks, exploring the spaces between inside and outside, you and me, imagination and reality. She has redesigned the gallery space into a more complicated and intriguing space, creating rooms within rooms, one of which you can only look into but not enter. As visitors walk around the gallery, they get different views of the paintings, through and around the walls. There is a theme of portals, thresholds and voids both in the gallery space and in the paintings.



Poster by Allison Katz for her exhibition *Artery* at Nottingham Contemporary, 2021. Courtesy the artist

The position of each painting in relation to the others. was very important to Allison while she making the paintings. There are two paintings, one on either side of the same wall, with large ovals that echo each other. One painting shows the inside of the gallery lift, not normally seen by visitors. *Katzenhöhle (Cat cave)*, in the enclosed room, repeats the image of the caves, layered over a plan of the street where Allison's grandparents lived.

Allison has five paintings in the exhibition where she has painted open mouths through which you can see another image; like portals to an alternative reality. Allison has borrowed the image of the mouth from 'Pantagruel', a 1943 woodcut by French artist Andre Derain and the lips in the painting with the title 'Ssik' from a painting by Surrealist artist Man Ray, 'The Lovers'.



Allison Katz, Ssik, 2020.
Courtesy the artist and Gió Marconi Milan.

Surrealism was an art movement in Europe in the 1920s and 30s. It is best known for its artworks and writings that explore the unconscious mind. Allison has been inspired by how Surrealist artists such as Man Ray and Salvador Dali paint dreamlike pictures that are a mixture of real and imaginary worlds.

Several of the paintings have sand or rice mixed in with the paint, creating textures that add to the physical sense of space in the picture.

All of the works in *Artery* were made during the last 18 months in London, including during national lockdowns. They explore ideas of communication and connection, of intimacy without touching – a response to this current moment and to themes that have persisted throughout painting's history.

Gallery 2

Mélanie Matranga: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4

French artist Mélanie Matranga is exhibiting a whole gallery installation and a new film *People* made over the last year. The exhibition unpicks the intricacies of our everyday lives, from relationships and work to wellbeing and money. Matranga's work contemplates what is public and what is private, with close attention to the poetry of the everyday. Matranga has, for a number of years, been preoccupied with intimacy and how it feels to be alone, even while we are together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made necessary new rules and behaviours around physical closeness and touch. In this context Matranga's work offers a deeply moving reading of the personal and social - how what might usually be private or hidden becomes public.

As visitors enter, they find themselves in a replica of an office kitchen, often a cramped place of awkward conversations. The cupboards are strewn with flowers and fruit. On one of the lower shelves is a model of Melanie's Paris apartment, where the film *People* was shot. There is a hidden door which leads into the enclosed screening room where *People (2021)* is being shown.

Nottingham Contemporary Teacher/Group Leader notes for Allison Katz, Melanie Matranga and Erika Verzutti

The film includes nudity and sexual acts. Under 18s are not permitted to view this work, and visitors may be asked to produce ID. A Gallery Assistant will be on hand to make sure social distancing is maintained and that only visitors who are eligible can enter the screening room.

Shot in the artist's own apartment, *People* (2021) follows 12 individuals from Matranga's life, playing 'themselves' in front of the camera with a collaboratively written script. Contrasting moments of isolation and togetherness reveal their feelings of dependency, worry and pain, both real and imagined.



Mélanie Matranga. Installation at Nottingham Contemporary, 2021 Photo by Stuart Whipps

The main gallery walls are exposed plasterboard and there is a partial low ceiling made of plastic sheet, suggesting that this is a space under construction, unfinished and unresolved. The lighting is quite theatrical; this is a staged space. New sculptural works – arrangements of mattresses, second-hand clothes and electrical cables are laid out and layered with clear plastic., Hand stitched words and numbers are repeated throughout, representing the structures by which we manage our lives.

Gallery 3 & 4 Erika Verzutti

Brazilian artist Erika Verzutti is showing her humorous and colourful sculptures from the past 15 years alongside new work made especially for Nottingham Contemporary's Gallery 4 with its extra high ceiling.

Erika is presenting more than 40 existing works. Usually modelled in clay, then cast in bronze or cement, the sculptures are inspired by a range of everyday things, including domestic objects, vegetables, fruit and eggs.

Erika's home country is represented in her *Brasilia* sculptures moulded in the shape of jackfruits, a popular snack in Brazil. She slices, carves and sculpts the fruit's shape, showing contrasting smooth and highly textured surfaces. In the surfaces of Erika's sculptures and wall reliefs, you can see smears, scratches, dents and fingerprints that show how she has handled the material, revealing the artist's hand in the creative process.



'Brasilia Cadeira' 2012 Bronze and acrylic, Edition 1/1 AP Private Collection, Brussels

Nottingham Contemporary Teacher/Group Leader notes for Allison Katz, Melanie Matranga and Erika Verzutti



Erika Verzutti 'Pencil (Lápis)', 2014
Copper alloy, acrylic and pigmented wax

The surfaces are often finished with paint, varnish, wax or resin, showing Erika's interest in exploring the boundaries between painting and sculpture.

As well as working with traditional 'precious' materials, Erika also works with simple papier mâché. She likes 'knowing that I can do practically anything in a day using only shredded newspaper and glue'.

Sculptures in **Gallery 3** are arranged on a series of display structures, specially designed by architect Alexandre Canonico that respond to the unusual angles of the space.

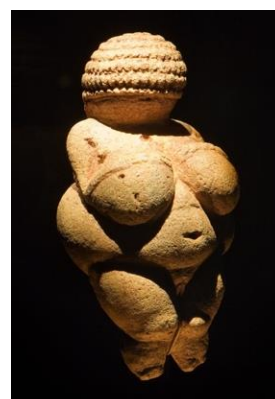
Erika takes inspiration from famous (male) artists such as Pablo Picasso and Constantine Brancusi, and remakes works in her style. Her sculpture 'Pencil (Lápis)' is similar to 'Endless Column', by Brancusi, a Romanian artist who lived and worked in Paris in the first half of the 20th century. 'Endless Column' was one of the first outdoor abstract sculptures and inspired many to think about how such a simple tower of repeated shapes represents infinity.

Erika also makes tributes in many works to the influential Modernist Brazilian female painter Tarsila do Amaral. These tributes take shape as a swan, cucumber or dinosaur, reflecting shapes in Tarsila's paintings.

In the double-height **Gallery 4**, are two giant new sculptures covered with papier mâché and a large bronze. The artist refers to them as *Venus*, the mother of all sculpture. They are inspired by the Venus of Willendorf, a 25,000-year-old sculpture (not in the exhibition), a symbol of fertility and female power. Erika's Venus sculptures are combinations of elongated abstract shapes, that rethink women's body shapes and the emphasis placed on certain present-day ideals of beauty.



Erika Verzutti, *Tarsila with Orange (Tarsila com Laranja)*, 2011. Courtesy of Alison Jacques Gallery, London © Erika Verzutti.



'Venus of Cream', 2021. Bronze.
'Venus Carnival' & 'Venus Resting' 2021.
Industrial papier mâché and styrofoam.
Courtesy of Alison Jacques, London.
Photo: Kathleen Stewart

'Venus of Willendorf',
Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria