

REGEN PROJECTS

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Christina Quarles at Regen Projects

May 8, 2019

Text by Dustin Metz & Christina Mesiti



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Christina Quarles, *Wrapped Up, Nicely* (2019). Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 42 x 1.5 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.
© Christina Quarles

At her solo show at Regen Projects, Christina Quarles lets her figures discover themselves. She paints bodies that contort to look towards each other as their faces turn inwards. Their hands and feet seem to reach toward other limbs, sprouting additional fingers as they do so. These stacked figures convey a feeling more connective than claustrophobic. Although breasts and nipples appear, the paintings refuse to foreground any habitual understanding of gender. Quarles defies conventional figuration in her paintings to uncover a multiplicity of sensations, letting the viewer feel the body's potential for freedom and exuberance.

Even today, figurative painters, with an eye towards Matisse, too often use the female body as an inert vehicle. The body becomes object on which to project painterly experimentation with form. Quarles, however, is not solely interested in the body's contours, but rather the shapes of its interior spaces—those felt but not seen. In *Laid Down Beside Yew* (2019), she employs sudden shifts between figure and ground. These fluid decisions that tangle interior and exterior spaces undermine the assumptions that a body is defined by a general idea of its appearance. Raw canvas also weaves its way through the painting, taking on the role of both space and body; in one moment, a canvas limb pierces through a thickly-painted pattern. Maria Lassnig described her own body sensation paintings, in which she only painted the parts of her body which she could physically feel, as a search “for a reality that was more fully in my possession than the exterior world.” Through her inventive mark-making, the seemingly infinite ways she finds to touch paint to canvas, Quarles extends Lassnig's idea of body sensation to indulge the physicality of paint. The opulence of painted mark-making performs for the viewer's eyes.

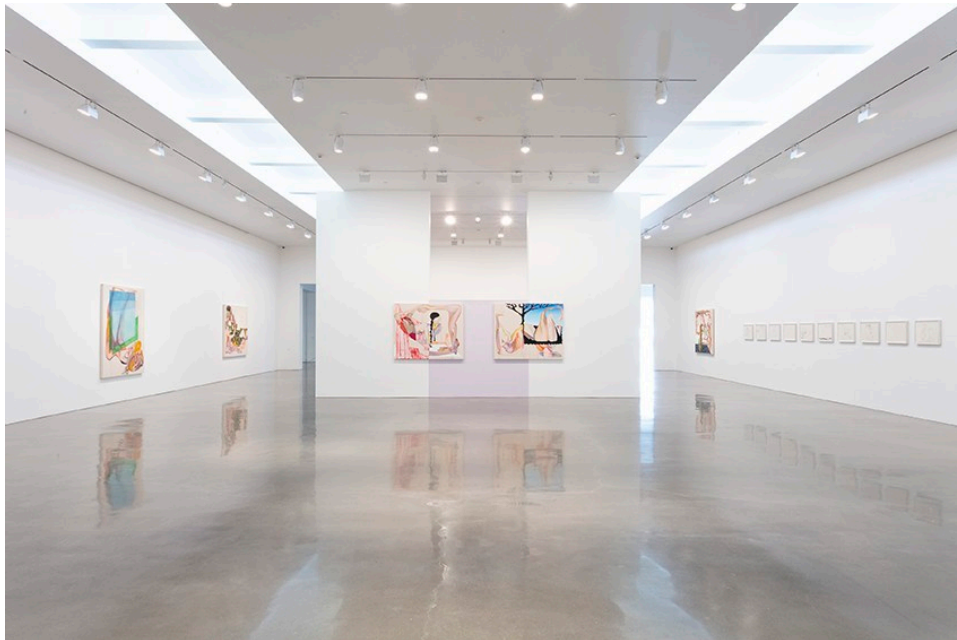
In this, Quarles also acknowledges that her paintings will first be seen rather than felt, and so forges a primary connection with the viewer through her dense visuals. This relationship of looking translates to the figures themselves. Quarles paints bodies that, in the midst of their tactile feeling, are also aware of being looked at. In *We Knew So Little Then / I Know Even Less Now...* (2019) a figure looks outward as if aware of being seen, her reclined posture reminiscent of an odalisque performing for another's gaze. As viewers, we watch Quarles' painted bodies as they both feel themselves and perform their touch. It is in this fusion of the felt and the performed that Quarles repurposes the objectifying habits of figuration, giving her figures agency even as they are aware of being viewed.

Christina Quarles: But I Woke Jus' Tha Same runs from April 6–May 9, 2019 at Regen Projects, Los Angeles (6750 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90038).

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Christina Quarles, *Laid Down Beside Yew* (2019). Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 96 x 2 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.
© Christina Quarles



Christina Quarles, *But I Woke Jus' Tha Same* (2019) (installation view).
Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.
Photo: Evan Bedford.

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Christina Quarles, *We Knew So Little Then / I Know Even Less Now...* (2019). Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 72 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Christina Quarles



Christina Quarles, *We Can Require No Less of Ourselves* (2019). Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 60 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Christina Quarles

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Christina Quarles, *Magic (Never Believe, It's Not So)* (2019). Ink on paper, 15.625 x 21.625 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Christina Quarles



Christina Quarles, *Take It Til Yew Make It* (2018). Ink on paper, 15.625 x 21.625 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Christina Quarles

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Christina Quarles, *But I Woke
Jus' Tha Same* (2019)
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