

## SummerWheat at Shulamit Nazarian

October 3, 2018



Summer Wheat, *Catch and Release* (2018). Acrylic on aluminum mesh, 68 x 96 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

There is something beautiful about the myth of prehistoric matriarchal societies—they feed the hope that, maybe one day, we could return to a woman-centered space if it did once exist. But this myth is exactly that: a fantasy, with little anthropological corroboration unearthed over the years to support the theory. And, certainly, Summer Wheat's vibrantly colored paintings of women, compositionally and metaphorically entwined with fish and other natural symbols, are full of spirited fantasy. They could therefore easily be dismissed as optimistic, escapist visions. Look more closely, however, and some unsightly things appear: A net of daggers over the shoulder of one woman, clad in spiked boots. Fish with mouths agape, gasping for air. A preponderance of sharp, dayglow fingernails.

These surprises complicate Wheat's otherwise jovial scenes of connection and communion, which she produces by pushing paint through sheets of aluminum mesh using palette knives and pastry piping bags. As paint oozes forward through the thin aluminum grid, it has the look of beads or embroidery, as if these were textiles rather than paintings. But unlike actual fiber-based work to which these might be compared—Christina Forrer's wonderfully weird tapestries and Diedrick Brackens' politically poignant weavings—there is a physical rigidity to Wheat's objects. Their thick impasto doesn't offer warmth or insulation. This provides another helpful counterbalance to her initially inviting fantasies, which is rendered, cartoon-like, via simplified lines and color fields. In *Catch and Release* (all works 2018), which gives the exhibition its title, women's bodies dive and sprawl across the flattened picture plane with arms and limbs reaching outward towards animals and each other, but they remain largely disconnected, absorbed in their own pursuits. The salmon-skinned fish clinging to the fingertips of two large, splayed hands in *Biting Nails* bring a similar sense of tension and anxiety, despite the work's cheerful hues and punning title. Behind the frieze of ladies in *Heavy Lifting*, the fish appear caged, with others trapped inside purses (caught, not released).

If feminist yens were to materialize, and the pendulum were to swing toward a world where, as the press release notes, "women were the original hunters, technologists, and artists," how might that look? Wheat's paintings intimate that, rather than a utopia, such a world might have its own follies and disorder. That said, it's still a place worth reaching, if only to see what possibilities a more balanced world than ours might hold.

*Summer Wheat: Catch and Release* runs from September 8–October 27, 2018 at Shulamit Nazarian (616 N. La Brea Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90036)



Summer Wheat, *Biting Nails* (2018). Acrylic on aluminum mesh, 68 x 96 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.