

ARUSHA

GALLERY

Kate Walters: Love Paintings

When one imagines the representation of divine, sublime love, one might envision a visual debt to the classical philosophical tradition where love has historically been equated to beauty, to transcendence, to a sort of perfection that can only be ultimately expressed in the immaterial. This perfection of love calls to mind delicate lines, bright and light colors, lofty and idealized figures, flawless in form, unreachable. This is not the picture of divine love Kate Walters unveils in *Love Paintings*, but be assured it is no less perfect. This is a glimpse into the soul of a woman in love, empowered, and, knowing her true self, opens herself up to receive the divinity of the embodied Other. This love is exalted, but it is also earthy, material, present, and it can crack you open like a fragile egg, revealing your most delicate inner places. Walters does not tell us stories of distant gods, these are great powers of love inhabiting mortal bodies, experiencing delirium, transformation, and rebirth. The colors are dark, the paint is thick, the pieces are sticky and raw. Walters gives us holy love in manifestation, an eternal play enacted in flesh and fluid. This makes it no less idealistic, no less something that we can strive for, but it is something that we can know. Yet to achieve this knowledge of love, you must be prepared to be a vessel, a vehicle for the spirits to live and love through, so they can experience the bliss of conjunction through your body, to be touched, and to be undone by love's revelation.

The key to understanding Walters' work is to know her as a shaman. She is a walker between worlds, a spirit worker, and her art is fundamentally about bringing Spirit into the material plane. She is called to in her dreams, which become a source of knowledge from other realms and dimensions, lending a sense of uncanny perception and inspiration to her work. Yet embodiment is central to both her art and her process. Although the shamanic world is where the power that is beyond her lies, Walters uses trance, dance and motion to call Spirit forward while painting, using ecstatic techniques to release herself from the confines of the rational mind: "When you release from here, from the brain, that's when the beauty comes. My guides will hold me and then they will show me. They won't show me until I let go." Walters believes that all our guides want to experience living in the world and they want to know the world through our bodies. In *Love Paintings* Walters asks what fires the body? What state of rapture evokes Spirit into us all?

There is no middle ground with Kate Walters' work; it can be light, gentle and delicate, like lace or the skeleton of a leaf, or it can be earthy like thick peat, like blood. You will travel with her, and light or dark, the journey will be deep. Walters' oeuvre demonstrates a remarkable range of techniques and emotional sensibilities. Her current project provides a stunning visual contrast to a previous series of exquisite yet eerie watercolors Walters completed during a Shetland residency in 2018. Those images are crisp, clean, with figures emerging from a dimension of calm purity, enveloped by a colorless void. That journey focused on motherhood, portraying spirits making contact through filaments, small, strange fetal figures floating in fields of white, a vision of herself before she was born, a painted child emerging from a celestial cervix.

Love Paintings indicate a bold shift in visual direction: Walters wants to move the viewer to a place of flesh, roots, and veins. These works are heavy, colorful and textural, with figures materializing

through peaked and glowing layers of pigment, rather than floating in empty space. Walters' palette features vivid pinks, reds and oranges, gold and yellow, contrasting with bodies twisting together in settings marked by rich and nuanced mixtures of brown and blue. These are colors of strength, power and joy, meant to convey the frenzy of embodied longing, lust, and sexual tension. Despite the contrasts, Walters' key preoccupation of deep ensoulment shines across her work. Even in their earthiness, *Love Paintings* have a frenetic, urgent quality to them, conveying the immediacy of connection and passion. Walters herself noted that these paintings "have that childlike quality of the unexpected", yet these pieces still feel like the journeys of old souls cavorting in the material plane, bringing the bodies they inhabit into spaces of wet ecstasy and libidinal initiation.

The central narrative of *Love Paintings* is the story of Eros and Psyche, as both mythic and psychosexual archetypes, inhabiting the lived journey of two earthly lovers, driving their passions and their quest for wholeness. Eros and Psyche as a tale contains many layers: It is the story of the longing of the King and Queen of the alchemical Conjunction working to complete the Hieros Gamos, reunited after an eternity of seeking completion and searching for each other. It is also a story of the marriage of the Soul with Desire, an allegory of union with the divine. In Jungian analyst James Hillman's landmark work *The Myth of Analysis*, the tale of Eros and Psyche reveals the fundamentally therapeutic, and often painful, process of soul making and refinement, the search for healing the fragmented self. Despite the lofty and otherworldly suggestions of the allegorical underpinnings, Walters' *Love Paintings* are not stories about transcendent, unreachable archetypes, these are the sacred dramas enacted through our corporeal reality. The changes and consequences wrought by divine connection are very real, and not easy. Once the anima and animus are awakened through dreams and brought to awareness, how do we navigate those relationships, those entities and the insights they inspire?

This collection is not chaste, it is replete with tongues, penetration and comingling of bodies, of humans, animals, angels and monsters in moments of transformation. The bodies here are unbounded, enmeshed with each other and with sources of otherworldly wisdom, becoming both beautiful and monstrous. In *Rapture* (2022), Walters presents us with what appears to be an alchemical rebis, the perfected being uniting the masculine and feminine, one body with two heads, fused in desire, washed in gold, signaling the completion of the Great Work. In several works, Walters also explores Tantric traditions and metaphors. In *Lovers in a Dream of Life Force* (2020) two bodies share the exaltation of rising kundalini, conjoined in an exchange of light and energy. The connection of our lovers here has an oracular, rapturous quality, their physical connection creating the channel for divine possession and insight.

Eyes and lips are a recurring motif, suggesting the portals through which energy and knowledge is passed into the bodies of our lovers. These eyes do not just witness, they also provide clear sight, emerging from the spaces in between bodies or arising up on bodies in unexpected places, because for Walters, divine love is visionary. In *Drawing up Cosmic Sight* (2022) and *Eros Caressing Psyche* (2022) we see the woman pulling divine power into her body through her yoni, itself a portal for connection and also for knowing. In *Falling Together, Rising Together from the Contours of Time*, (2022) the yoni itself becomes an eye, a conduit for the passing of the wisdom of the Gods between lovers. The phallus also provides the means for the transfer of astral intelligence. In *I Dreamed of You Painting; You Were Ecstatic* (2022) the woman is carried by the man on his shoulders as she is being penetrated with a stream of energy from his crown chakra, an image that is at once supportive, nurturing, and deeply transformative.

For all the fierceness of these images, Walters expresses a great deal of rawness and vulnerability in these paintings. Before Eros and Psyche achieve the union of divine bliss, Psyche must complete several trials assigned to her by the Goddess of Love herself. The culmination of Psyche's travails is a trip to the underworld to retrieve the secret of beauty to be presented to Venus. Many of Walters' images capture the pain and pleasure of this journey, the ways in which the openness to love forces an unraveling of one's self. The seemingly ominous title, *Body of Wounding and Streaming Piercings* (2021) contrasts with the image of a bright figure covered in punctures, highlighted by opalescent blues and a near bubble gum pink. Despite her many wounds, light pours out from her torn flesh and her bodily orifices. Her face is frightened, perhaps also ecstatic, as fountains of energy stream forth in brilliant torrents from the top of her head.

Walters paints injured and broken souls seeking restoration and completion, with the promise of lovers reborn and, in some way, purified. In *Wounded Angel with Wounded Man* (2021) two figures, one dark one golden, face each other directly, with clarity and purpose, witnessed by spirits in their connection. Divine love also serves here as a vehicle for the healing of the inner child, with the nurturing lover taking many roles as savior, parent, priest and midwife. As in Walters' other collections, childbirth is a recurring theme here and *Love Paintings* features several images of birth, and generation. *He Draws Her Out of Me*, (2021) and *He Delivers Me* (2021) are very literal images of childbirth, but the magical child in these pieces seems to not be a separate entity, but a metaphor for transition into a new state. In *Little Kate Comes Back from the Light*, (2021) we see the happy return and integration of the healed child.

In the end, Psyche becomes an immortal, blissfully united with her love Eros for eternity, but her arduous journey has been one of alchemical refinement, a powerful confrontation with death, mortality and rebirth through encounters with the Other and also with the self. *Love Paintings* teach us how, in love, our spirits possess and transform each other, and ultimately, how we possess ourselves. They are a reminder of what we can become when we are lovers, how, in connection, we give birth to each other and how, through love, we make each other sacred.

- Amy Hale, 2022