

Vibrant Worlds: Sojourner Truth Parsons at Esther Schipper

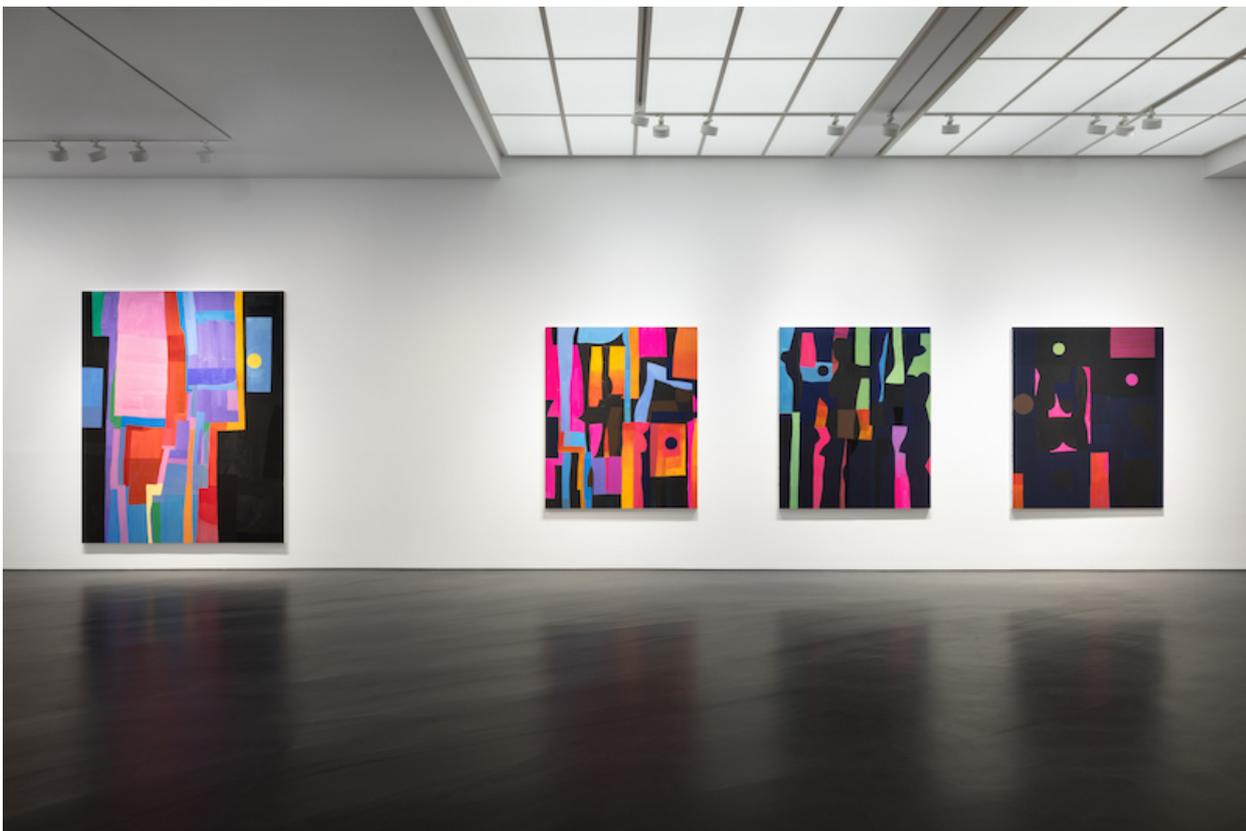


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30. Juni 2023

by Eva Szwarc // June 30, 2023

The heat of a summer night in the city, a fleeting silhouette of a woman by her window, the slit of dying light between the gap of two buildings. These are some of the images evoked in Sojourner Truth Parsons' small but exuberant exhibition. 'If nobody wants you you're free' presents nine large paintings—and one series of smaller paintings—as an entirely new body of work and the artist's most abstract yet. The playful treatment of shape and colour creates emotive yet ambiguous landscapes, onto which visitors inevitably cast their own projections.

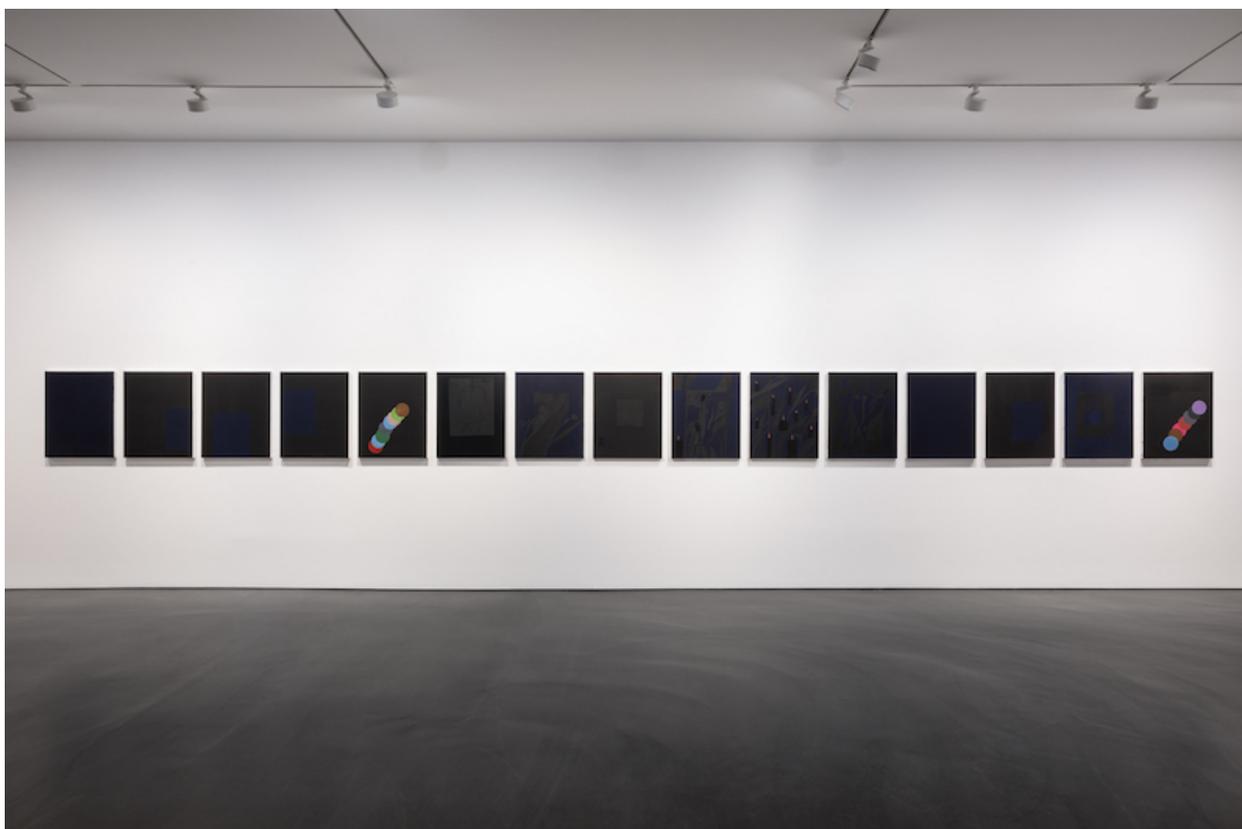


Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free,' installation view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023 // Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

Parsons is deft at playing with the intensity dial of colour. Whereas in parts a softened palette appears more naturalistic, elsewhere hot pinks and bright orange offer tanginess that feels artificial. For the most part, this sense of place is delivered by the sharp colours, allowing thoughts of fluorescent lights and loud advertisements to surface. Few explicit references are made; in 'You will get older' (2023), blocks of dark blues and black assume rolled-up high-rise buildings and through the oblong window of

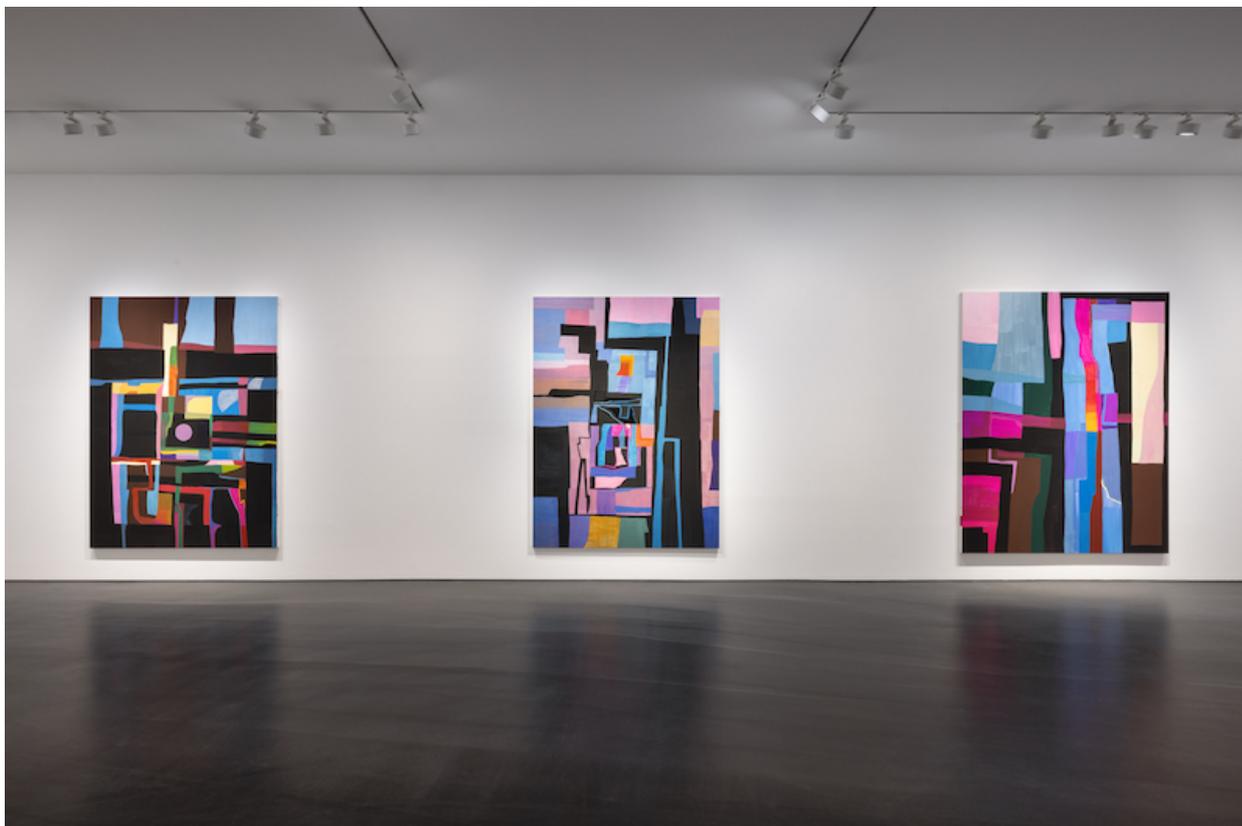
one, the moon (or a dusty sun) is glimpsed. In 'Pain III' and 'Rain on Leaves', the shapes of a woman are segmented but discerned.

The smaller series of paintings, titled 'End of April beginning of May,' pepper one wall of the gallery like a meditative interlude. Nearly exclusively painted with deep blues and black on black, the paintings have a dash of brightness here and there: the illumination of a candle's lit wick or a series of overlapped, colourful circles, as though an object reduced to its unfocussed bokeh. A playfully positioned black frog reappears in the shrouded night. The series offers us a quiet space in the dark, the title speaking to the anticipation of longer, lighter days that will stretch out once more.



Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'End of April beginning of May,' 2023, acrylic on canvas, set of 15 paintings, 76,3 x 61,5 x 3,5 cm (each, 15 parts), exhibition view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023 // Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

Threaded together, the titles read like snippets from a poem. If the paintings were to be untitled, a touch of the personal would be lost. 'You will get older,' 'Beginning of the end,' 'Drinking alone I,' 'Pain III': each of these sparks a sensation, invoking something both universal and vague enough to elicit a personal response or insertion from the viewer. This works to the power of Parson's abstract paintings which, in the atmosphere they conjure, invite visitors to connect their own dots of meaning together.



Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free,' installation view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023 // Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

There are instances in which the worlds of the work stammers. In 'The wind blows it rattles, I close my eyes' and 'Life knows how to live here,' the outskirts of a painting work as a frame in which a smaller, more intricate one is placed. One offsets the other in a way that feels irresolute. The eye is left without quite knowing where to settle. Perhaps, given the artist's self-proclaimed love for edges, this is part of the intention. Edges can visually segment, clarify and even simplify, but they also have the power to obstruct, confuse and unsettle. It comes back to a certain sense of playfulness, controlled by colour and shape and microscopically skewed by the attention to detail—artwork titles, for example—on which Parsons has a steady grip. In this sense, the artist sets the scene, inviting us into a vibrant world, within which we each may come away with our own sense of place.

Exhibition Info

Esther Schipper Berlin

Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free'

Exhibition: June 8-Jul. 6, 2023

estherschipper.com

Potsdamer Str. 81e/3rd Floor, 10785 Berlin, [click here for map](#)

Sojourner Truth PARSONS

b. 1984 in Vancouver, Canada / lives and works in New York

For nearly ten years now, the paintings of Sojourner Truth Parsons have trafficked in the saturated and sensorial. Known for canvases that are as lucid and immediate as they are fragmentary and unfixed, Parsons' practice is driven by an elemental concern with the psychic life of the everyday, delineating the feelings, forms, and fantasies that structure our worlds.

Bodies, flora and fauna, the city around her—these forms recur across the Vancouver-born, New York-based artist's work, indexes for the emotional acuties and atmospheric intensities that occupy her time in the studio. Whether rendering the dark heat of desire or the vacuous pull of despair, Parsons dispenses with distinctions between interior and exterior realms, nudging us instead toward a lexicon of the energetic and affective.

In *L'Invitation au voyage*, Parsons presents a suite of canvases grounded in darkness. Shadows stretch languidly across the surface of these works, with loosely brushed expanses of black suggesting the cover of nightfall, when thresholds between sense and sensation are at their gauziest. Here, Parsons offers a city imaged in fragments—the mirrored surface of the Manhattan skyline at dusk, moonlight playing on the East River—scenes drawn as readily from the artist's frequent wanderings near her Brooklyn studio as from the New York of her mind's eye, one conjured at least in part from relic.

Operating on a perceptual plane that is both brisk and persuasive, these works are executed with a canny palette and knowing economy of perspective, one that privileges truth over fact and feeling over form. In reproductions of Parsons'



Sojourner Truth Parsons, *July Tree*, 2020-2021, acrylic on canvas,
213,5 x 183 x 4 cm (83 7/8 x 72 1/8 x 1 5/8 in)

works, this quality often translates to an obliging uniformity, the surfaces of her canvases appearing to coalesce into a graphic coolness, pitched against spreads of flat, saturated color. To stand in front of these paintings, however, is to absorb a flatness of an altogether different register, one in which paint is harnessed thinly and intuitively to build images with the haptic quality of a vision: articulate in detail, but fragile in form.

The moon anchors these compositions, repeating bright and full across all three canvases, their central figures seemingly tethered to its transportive energies: desire, fantasy, introspection, risk. In *July Tree*, two women appear in silhouette, a recurring motif in Parsons' work, one that casts the body as both energy and form. A neck arched in pleasure, a lithe figure extending outside the frame—these are shadowy, sharp-edged

presences, as elusive as they are compelling. Amidst their charge sits the suggestion of the city at night, its structures and rhythms, the fullness of its promises and potency of its perils.

In *Falling out of love with you*, this tension comes into sharper focus, a gowned and gloved figure—noirishly stylized, the very projection of desire—gazing across the harbor toward Manhattan, a single long-stemmed rose in hand. Looser, prosaic florals flank the image, set against crude patchworks of blushes and golds. These arrangements puncture the shield of night, suggesting a scene about to end, the veil of illusion giving way to other forms of beauty—perhaps less precise in their elegance, but awaiting us regardless.

The received idea will always exceed the frame of reality, Parsons reminds us—the fantasy by its very



Sojourner Truth Parsons, *Falling out of love with you*, 2020-2021, acrylic on canvas, 213,2 x 182 x 3,8 cm (83 7/8 x 71 5/8 x 1 1/2 in)

nature is one fallible in form. A woman stares wistfully out a window in *Pray for sex*, the city reflecting back at her as a goddess candle burns on offer below. It's uncommon for Parsons to render faces in her work, even rarer with the level of detail on view here. When she does, however, these faces are nearly always white—parodically, blue-bloodedly white—a mordant nod to the ways love and fantasy are imaged and internalized culturally, with Parsons pointedly underscoring to whom the province of illusion so often belongs. In just a few strokes, Parsons makes plain to us that the look on this woman's face is not one of longing, but rather of expectation—unthinking, unfulfilled, unshakable, devastating. 🍷

— Matthew Hyland



Sojourner Truth Parsons, *Pray for sex*, 2020-2021, acrylic on canvas,
248,5 x 202,8 x 5 cm (97 7/8 x 79 7/8 x 2 in)

The New York Times

SOJOURNER TRUTH PARSONS

*Through Aug. 16. Foxy Production;
foxyproduction.com.*

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Let's say you start "Sex and Love With a Psychologist," a tricky new show by Sojourner Truth Parsons, with the painting "Ocean With Piano." There you'll find a paperdoll ballerina on point in front of a matte black background.

Behind the dancer are several views of a full moon, "attached" to the painting's bottomless darkness with trompe l'oeil blue tape,

and beside her is a lavender doppelgänger. If, then, you turn to "Tell Them That It's Human Nature" and find the same ballerina behind a seated, naked young woman, and both of them enclosed together in another painting-within-the-painting under another piece of blue "tape," you may think you've got the point: The show, as billed, is about sex, love and escalating levels of self-consciousness, as well as a steady cultural drumbeat of highly stereotyped images of femininity.

But since you could just as easily find a different progression entirely — crisscross the gallery following the round yellow moon, instead, or simply linger in front of the jagged, fractured face in "My Perfect Look" — it's almost impossible to get your footing. The secret, I finally realized, was in those changeless black backgrounds, which the paintings' reds, yellow, and hot pinks throw into such relief. Though they look thick and velvety online, if you're able to visit in person you'll discover that they're painted quick and thin.

In combination with the sketchy drawing, this makes the whole group of paintings look as much like stage dressings as they do like a gallery show — which adds a final, crucial turn to the work's self-consciousness.

WILL HEINRICH

Hyland, Matthew. Introductory text for "Sojourner Truth Parsons: Holding Your Dog At Night", 2017, at Oakville galleries, Oakville, ON, Canada



Oakville galleries

With their canny palette and crude perspective, the paintings of Sojourner Truth Parsons readily dispense with distinctions between interior and exterior worlds. Rendering the atmospheric and emotive energies she encounters as lucidly as physical truths, the Canadian-born artist observes a broad affective terrain in her work, documenting the dizzy indulgences of glamour and money as gamely as the dark heat of shame.

Holding Your Dog At Night brings together a series of canvases produced by Parsons since she relocated to Los Angeles in 2015. Whether detailing the city's infamous nightlife, its extraordinary sunlight or the economic disparities on which it is built, Parsons' works offer a kind of baroscopic depiction of the spaces and places she moves through, at once ingenuous and acerbic. Neither autobiographical nor narrative in form, these paintings instead nudge us toward the psychic life of the everyday, to the feelings, forms and fantasies—both saccharine and sinister—that structure our worlds.

ARTFORUM

"I Am Silver"

FOXY PRODUCTION
2 East Broadway, 200
June 26–July 29

The lovely and occasionally creepy figurative paintings by six intriguing artists take shade beneath the curatorial parasol of a Sylvia Plath poem. "I Am Silver," the show's title, is borrowed from the first line of "Mirror," in which the poet assumes the titular object's dispassionate voice. With sly, mounting despair, she/it narrates the waning of a woman's desirability. Beauty and its cruel, ridiculous genderedness might be the metasubject here. In Plath's tradition, the works on view mourn, satirize, cheapen, or resent beauty, or make it horrifying, without utterly eradicating it.

Chelsea Culprit's *Watermelon Crawl*, 2016, is a funny, unsettling iteration of art-class Surrealism in a punchy Lisa Frank palette. Lavender lips hover on a damaged canvas while a disembodied arm boasts a watermelon-patterned, bubble-fingered hand opposite a green talon. Kiki Kogelnik contributes an exhilarating monster-woman in *Untitled*, ca. 1972. She's got bedroom eyes and a pinup pout, but her face is striped in candy colors, with crimson spines sprouting from a head of helmet hair. Becky Kolsrud's girls are phantoms—her druggy, Kilimnikesque faces peer wistfully through lattices. Justin Vivian Bond's meticulous diptychs are full of mysterious longing: Bond pairs self-portraits with reverential homages to the iconic Estee Lauder model Karen Graham, both of them styled identically. Sojourner Truth Parsons presents a cool, grubby take on Matisse's buoyant compositions in the forbiddingly titled *The same rope that pulls you will hang you his and hers edition 1*, 2016. An angular bright-pink nude floats in a collaged environment, with a wonderfully nonchalant, dingy daub-y white poodle in the foreground. Anna Glantz dramatizes another common thread—the mirror as hallucinatory springboard. Her painted pastiches—sci-fi scenarios suggesting time travel and other worlds—are more views *through* the looking glass than renderings or distortions of its reflections.



Justin Vivian Bond, *My Barbie Coloring Book*, 2014, watercolor on archival paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2".

— Johanna Fateman

CANADIANART

FEATURES

7 Best Bets for Art Toronto

OCTOBER 27, 2016

BY CANADIAN ART



Sojourner Truth Parsons, *Why can't you drive us home*, 2016. Courtesy Tomorrow Gallery.

Sojourner Truth Parsons and More at Tomorrow Gallery

It's New York-based gallery Tomorrow's first time at Art Toronto, and director Tara Downs has chosen to show three Canadian artists with roving international practices. (Downs is a Canadian transplant herself—she co-founded Tomorrow in Toronto before establishing its current iteration in Manhattan's Lower East Side. She'll be speaking on the subject at our Satellites panel on Saturday at 2:30 p.m.) Aleksander Hardashnikov, another co-founder of Tomorrow who now runs Toronto project space the Loon, has had international success in recent solo exhibitions in Oslo, Berlin and Brussels. His oil-on-panel works are both delicate and dark, as if your metalhead teenage brother was also really into ukiyo-e.

There are delectable new paintings by Los Angeles-based Sojourner Truth Parsons, whose solo show at Tomorrow this spring garnered a glowing critic's pick in *Artforum*. The new works include abstracted black-hole sunsets embellished with "a little glitter"; romantic rosebuds; and silken-eared, pink-tongued puppies. Hanna Hur, another Los Angeles resident and twice-in-a-row nominee for the last two RBC Canadian Painting Competitions, shows dreamy and subdued scenes drawn on linen with china marker and coloured pencil. If I were to bring home any three works from Art Toronto, I'd take one by each of Tomorrow's artists. —*Rosie Prata, managing editor*

CANADIANART

SOJOURNER TRUTH PARSONS

by Fiona Duncan

When Sojourner Truth Parsons tells me she's "so sincere, very sincere, super sincere, overly sincere," I believe her. Partly because she's Canadian, and partly for the way she handles her dog, Toni, a spritely blonde who lolls feline in her arms, and totally, I believe her, because of her voice. With a slight lisp, Parsons's voice volleys over words; it's sweet, like melon scooped with a spoon tailored to ball the fruit; mother and child, sorrow and hope, conviction and apprehension all rolled up in it. In Los Angeles, people talk big. Lie is the law, gossip, gospel. It's a survival strategy, listening for subtext. What's beneath, usually, is desire. People still come to LA to make dreams come true. Parsons's dreams, while modest by Hollywood standards, are most ambitious. She wants "to be the best artist that I can be." This is to be a lifelong pursuit. "Art is just what I do," she says. Now, at 32, the British Columbia-raised creator, who has Mi'kmaq and African Canadian heritage, is committed: "It's a relationship," Parsons insists. "Better than any love affair! (When it's good.) My art practice is my family. I wonder what age I'll be when I feel like it's coming from my vagina."

She's patient. As Parsons and I walked, one magic-hour Monday, along LA's dry riverbed (her choice setting, Toni digs it), the artist mused that what professional success she seeks may not land for decades. She projects herself as a woman revered solely in old age. "*Your work is strange, meaningful, and you're feminist,*" she says, parroting that status. "*You've struggled, now here's your place.* That's the kind of success I yearn for." Like Louise Bourgeois? I ask. "Betty Woodman," she rejoins. With Ontarioan politesse, I suggest that *maybe* Parsons could expect more—that such late expectations exist for women artists because of capitalist patriarchy, that precedent and ongoing, though crumbling, reality. Parsons agrees: "You can't let this misogynistic system define your worth." But because she needs to make art ("If I'm not, I feel dead"), Parsons rests in this peace of mindfulness: "You don't have to arrive by anyone else's standards to feel that you are able to be here, doing what you're doing."

Parsons paints daily. Since moving to Los Angeles from Toronto in March 2015, she's on a roll, receiving enough to continue to buy materials and paint. She's shown at Toronto's Cooper Cole, New York's Tomorrow and LA's Phil and Night Galleries. The work is delicate and hearty, like her voice. On a recent canvas, the hair of the figure is brushed so faint, like water on sunned concrete, it seems on the brink of fading out of sight. In other works, minstrel Mickey Mouses knock knees near Betty Boop-ish full moons who're multiply impaled by fingers and lift their likenesses like dumbbells. In one of my favourites, money is gunky. American dollars, or Canadian 20s—green bills, in thick acrylics: jaded, forestrial, bluesy and phlegmatic—fight for space as a lone grey glove reaches to collect. It's a rare cool-toned work from an artist who paints, usually, hot and dark, "from the heart." A vision, I feel, of commercial expectation; as in our conversation, Sojourner parsed truth out of it.

CULTURED

LA WOMEN: SOJOURNER TRUTH PARSONS

ART | SEP 2016 | BY MICHAEL SLENKE



In an era when identity politics are so prevalent, specifically in the U.S., it's easy to trivialize the travails of our neighbors to the north. Imagine the journey of a Black-Mi'kmaq-Caucasian Canadian painter born to an absentee father and a single mother who enlisted a craft-crazed grandmother to watch her child while she earned a living as a graphic designer for a television station in Victoria, British Columbia. "My nana was a knitter. She made crazy shit around me all the time, blankets and sweaters and hats with so many colors and patterns, but I felt really strange growing up," says Sojourner Truth Parsons. Her name was picked out by her mother who was visiting a Judy Chicago exhibit in 1984 when baby Sojourner kicked as she was passing a reference to the 19th century abolitionist and activist.

Though she wanted to "be a star" as a child, Truth Parsons' younger sister—now a professional dancer and choreographer—proved the more talented performer. "I would always draw out the things I wanted to be," she explains of her early sketches of legs doing splits or turns. "I just pull from my life. My dad wasn't around much when I was growing up so I had all these watercolors of this black man. It's always been an expression of a personal journey."

After graduating from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and burning through a few Canadian galleries, Truth Parsons' journey ultimately led her to a residency at New Mexico's Santa Fe Art Institute in 2014, where she used sand, acrylic and ceramic to make collaged canvases with warm colors and pink poodles to tackle notions of rejection and shame. That year she also connected with Davida Nemeroff and Mieke Marple, the founders of Los Angeles' Night Gallery, who invited Truth Parsons to show these works in "Hot House," their 2014 pop-up show in Harlem during New York's Frieze Week. A year later, she ducked out to Mexico City "to get away for a bit," but Nemeroff encouraged her to come back to the States and check out L.A. for a few months in order to make a new body of work.

"When I first got here, I was out at the Beverly Hills Hotel and the Chateau Marmont and I was really overwhelmed. I'm sober so I'd just be talking to these beautiful lips, mouths and cigarettes. That's what was coming at me, these glamorous, weird experiences," says Truth Parsons over a kombucha in her new light-and-flower-filled loft studio overlooking Downtown L.A. Evoking the single point perspectives of Matisse interiors, Tom Wesselmann's early Pop Art icons, the sex appeal of Patrick Nagel posters, and the dark beauty of Hollywood glitz, her sand-covered acrylic collages and canvases were an instant hit with collectors and earned Truth Parsons shows this year at New York's Tomorrow Gallery and Night, where she will make her solo debut September 16. While she could easily forge a factory from her recent works, Truth Parsons lives by the Rosemarie Trockel adage: "The minute something works, it ceases to be interesting. As soon as you have spelled something out, you should set it aside."

"I don't think the world needs more objects. You don't need my painting in that way. What I can offer is my feelings and emotions towards the world," she says. "I'm looking at art through my heart. Maybe that's selfish, but I want to find something I didn't know was there."

While this "selfishness" led her to painting scenes of women looking away from the viewer for Tomorrow—reflecting her retreat from the Hollywood fast life into a more domestic existence in Pasadena—Truth Parsons is showing an entirely new body of work at Night about "women, women, women and the sun," she says. "I want to find the painting, I don't want to make it. It's so much about vibes."

MOMUS

— A RETURN TO ART CRITICISM —

Stardust Tears: Sojourner Truth Parsons's "Crying in California"

BY ANDREW BERARDINI • UNCATEGORIZED • OCTOBER 10, 2016



The looping ladies and lipsticked cigarettes of Sojourner Truth Parsons's past pictures give way here to a litter of pups amidst polychromatic explosions sopping with glitter. Rose petals peel back and the haunting silhouette of red and black palettes (literal ones) hint at a painter finding a new shimmer in her voice. The show's title, *Crying in California*, comes from a black-on-black monochrome of the swooped profile of a dog. But a couple pictures over is another pup with stardust teardrops (*Bullet Proof Soul*, all works 2016), surrounded by a maelstrom of colorful canvas cut-outs, that makes the title more obvious. A midnight butterfly looks to alight on top of that puppy's nose, but one isn't sure if its wings bring a delicate blessing or a darkling curse. And though these aren't the first dogs to appear in Parson's paintings as regal silhouettes, their central presence here hints that they're psychic familiars and beloved companions – emotional revealing, heart-struck and hopeful.

In *Bullet Proof Soul*, the figuration and patchwork abstraction throughout the exhibition come swirling together in breathy pinks, tender purples, and harvest gold. They flutter around this tearful creature.

Amidst these spare figures and flurrying colors, a darkness creeps from the gravitas of that black-on-black monochrome to other paintings. Two smirking dogs (their respective furs flaxen and cream), with scrappy pink tongues wagging, emerge from a black tableau in the hilariously-titled *Every Shit You Take*. A noir painter's palette hangs like a sinister spaceship over a collage of color in *August !*. And in *Rose* the eponymous flower floats high in a dark field, subtly stroked into existence with ethereal hues, whilst a new moon floats beside it within portentous shadow. In *Sunset !*, the subdued hues of rectangular cuts of canvas float in the blackness of a coming night. Hardly the standard representational sunset of its title, you can almost imagine Parsons cutting all the shifting colors from a long twilight and scattering them into fifth-dimensional shards to make this Technicolor dreamcoat.

A question of where we've been and where we're going undulates throughout Parson's contours and cuts. It's not the hanging, precisely, but the subjects and methods of the exhibition that hint at some narrative, an unfolding process, one which begins or ends in those paintings composed of layered canvas scraps. At their most raw, they make for a kind of rare abstraction from an artist who normally deals with the curves of bodies and motifs of things. Perhaps not an abstraction, but rather these layered shreds are purely what they are, a painter finding in the destruction of other canvases a rebirth in their combination. But whether these patchworks start the series or close it remains mysterious to me. *August !* solidly hints at the strongest cleaving with the widest and brightest range of colors. A mermaid's blue mane, an elegant dowager's pink face powder, and an orange peeled out of a California sundown, all of these are smeary with a silver that shifts and reflects with the cold glow of the gallery's fluorescent lamps.

Parsons's paintings are emotive and everyday, but full of possibility and premonition, hidden meanings drawn from nature or intuition. You feel one woman trying to find her own piece of mind while channeling a divine feminine. Parsons summons an atmosphere where the boundary between the internal world of emotions and spirit and the external world of things dissolves, capturing a state of being that reveals the illusion that they were ever separate.

All of it comes together in a scent.

And alongside acrylic and raw pigment, Flashe and glitter, Parson lists amongst her painting materials "lavender essence." The sweet washer of old sins and their memories, lavender perfume leaves in its soft embrace the possibilities of forgetting, the striking of what came before, and the grace of the unknown that comes after. A purgative and cleanser, lavender is a forgiving smell.

Awash in all this, are the tears in *Crying in California* of sorrow or joy?

Both, probably.

ARTFORUM

Sojourner Truth Parsons

TOMORROW
106 Eldridge Street
March 25–April 24

Strawberry-flavored Dippin' Dots, Sobranie Slims, Himalayan salt lamps, the ombré hem of Gwen Stefani's wedding dress, the drunk tank at Santa Clara County, carnations on Mother's Day, orchids, a love stone, Cam'ron in mink, Sissy Spacek as Pinky in *3 Women* (1977), a Juicy Couture velour tracksuit, a Jem doll's hair, Bazooka gum, an inflatable flamingo, Pucci lingerie from the 1960s, Wet n Wild 901B in a black plastic tube: These are the shadings of pink in Sojourner Truth Parsons's new paintings that involve, variously, a Dalmatian, flowers, cigarettes, acrylic nails, and a temporary tattoo dispenser's worth of butterflies. Many of these works seem to be of the artist's best friend, Julia, whose face is never seen. She's always turned around—perhaps blushing.

Hung large in the narrow rooms of this Lower East Side gallery, the five canvases on view are done in a real naïf style that owes a few things, directly or indirectly, to the Royal Art Lodge of fin-de-siècle Winnipeg. Outside Canada, where Parsons grew up and went to art school, the trend is obtained from the works and ethos of Paul Klee, or of Albert Oehlen, and it too often manifests, among newer painters, as badness, for a simple lack—or premature refusal—of taste. Parsons is better than that. And sweeter. Hers are no Sunday paintings, but paintings in which every day is Sunday, with a Sunday's sense that a private self must be indulged. Hence the delicate pleasures here, the coordinated languor, and the attendant deep blues.



Sojourner Truth Parsons, *Heartbeats Accelerating*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60".

— Sarah Nicole Prickett

ART / AGENDA

Sojourner Truth Parsons' "I Got Allergies"

by Andrew Berardini

The soothing whispers of the song drift beneath the shift and chatter of the opening party like a lavender mist, velvety fingers. The next door gallery was open but not opening. Empty, its harsh white lights beam like a drugstore. But here, the light is softer. Everything is softer.

Ooh baby / yes ooh baby / When we're out in the moonlight / Looking up on the stars above / Feels so good when I'm near you / Holding hands and making love.

"Baby" by Donnie and Joe Emerson isn't officially part of Sojourner Truth Parsons' first solo exhibition in Los Angeles (itself only the second show at the newly-opened Phil Gallery). But, hearing it on repeat during the opening, its sad longing and gentle desires reveal her aesthetic too perfectly to ignore, soundly shaping the various collage paintings, the ebbing video, and curious sculptures. Written and recorded by the teenage Emerson brothers on a farm in 1979, their record sold only a few copies, and its expense almost bankrupted their family. A collector purchased a thrift store copy in 2008 and, thirty years later, *Dreamin' Wild* (1979) became an underground sensation covered by LA cult hero Ariel Pink, who described "Baby" as "pure atmosphere." And it is. A teenage boy's voice moans sweet nothings to the simplest of rhythms. Sad without being dark, haunting but only a little mournful, innocence with a first taste of sensuality.

Pure atmosphere, "I Got Allergies" is hardly teen naïve. But even experienced, it's still somehow pure. In the middle of the room cluster giant white grapes with a popsicle-handle angling out (*it's my life*, 2015). Made roughly from paper collage and sand, and embedded mysteriously here and there with rhinestones, the popsicle has melted a perfect pool of white paint onto the floor. The grapes' chewed skins look a bit gross, but the mâché mass also holds a gentle charm. A fantasy treat dropped by a giant child, a Claes Oldenburg relic from "The Store" (1961) that couldn't take the summer heat.

A few feet away, a long screen tucked into the corner plays a video of a single rose drifting slowly in the cool chemical blue of a swimming pool (*Untitled*, 2015). Collage paintings angle and swell off the walls with tertiary colors and scrappy material showing fractured scenes, pieced out and layered in mysterious ways. Two floating fingers with long red nails seem at a glance to hold a cigarette in *tuesday morning* (2015)—but the fingers are deep lavender and unattached to any hand, while the cigarette isn't between the fingers but floating behind them. Hands appear twice more, with different flesh and polishes. In *for women's eyes only* (2015), white fingers with pink nails wiggle freely across the surface, just a tease of John Wesley's sexy pop but never aspiring to the crisp, flat cleanliness of his playful planes of color. Protruding and recessed, sometimes smooth though usually messy with texture, altogether composed, Parsons' paintings possess a loose freedom and carefree confidence.

Walking past the crowd into the back room, an ice sculpture carved into the shape of poodle stands with its feet strewn with paper roses. *Heart is Melting Ice* (2015) is a collaboration between Parsons and Davida Nemeroff, who is exhibiting in the gallery's bathroom. Someone tells me I can touch it. Rivulets of chill water melt away as I slope my hands over the frozen surface, crystalline and temporary. The flowers lying at the puppy's paws emote sentimentality but are hardly cloying. The Emerson brothers' song finales. I glance over to see a cell phone hooked into speakers with the tune displayed on its screen. Drying off dripping fingers on jeans, I press repeat and walk away. The boys' voices follow me into the night.