

Kate McCrickard & Dasha Shishkin: *TELLTALE*

14 – 29 November 2025

Emanuel von Baeyer Gallery, 18 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE

What tales are these? What are the telltale signs and to what do they allude? There is truth and fantasy, folly and madness, humour and wickedness, the absurd amidst the everyday, all of them juxtaposed in vivid tangled compositions, much as in real life. There are also more contemplative monotypes of single figures: smokers, drinkers, cats and various urban individuals; performers on a private stage created by each artist.

Kate McCrickard and Dasha Shishkin are old friends with very different backgrounds and professional careers, but they are linked through their love of drawing and printmaking and their rich, liberated narrative imagination. Their work is brought together from their studios in Paris and New York for the first time in an intriguing dialogue presented by the Emanuel von Baeyer gallery in London.

Line links them further: Shishkin's is fluid and faultless; its beauty a distraction from her subjects' fiendishness. McCrickard uses hers to lasso form and pin down the paint. Visual and verbal wit is important – Shishkin's titles deliberately bear little relation to her images. McCrickard's work is more rooted in close observation of the world that is pushed through the grinder of imagination and memory, while Shishkin's art "evinces an imagination as fizzy as Hecate's cauldron,"^[1] – perhaps a sensibility informed by her childhood in Russia where her father was artistic director for the Moscow Puppet Theatre. And speaking of witches – feminists they might be? But women don't get off lightly, appearing as crones, gossips, chain-smoking birth machines, sadistic nurses or simply breasts served up on a plate.

Children are neither sweetened nor pandered to.

Let's look at the two largest works, both paintings: Kate McCrickard's *The Life Class*, (130 x162cm) and Dasha Shishkin's *Testing of Unconditional Parental Love* (123 x 100cm). McCrickard remembers the discipline of the life drawing room at Edinburgh College of Art, and fills the studio setting with eleven individuals, including the companionable skeleton in the foreground, who are focused on drawing the male nude lying in the centre, concentrating on his right hand and penis, both painted in bright yellow!

Shishkin's pair of figures have a deco setting where the smiling nude woman turns her back on us, clasping a red book in her left hand and pinching between her buttocks a rolled-up journal of sorts. The young boy in blue shorts has a cartoon moon face. Is he the son testing parental love? The enigmatic is everywhere. In a small monotype from an exhibition called 'We Are All Pies', she offers us a hospital room with surgeons attending to a reclining woman birthing a comical yellow figure from her buttock, while another colourful monotype is called 'Peeing Onto a Cat'. The naughty, childish act is beautifully rendered and as McCrickard observed in an article written for *Art in Print* journal in 2013, "Shishkin lures us inward, exploits our love of looking at the gently fetishistic and degraded and invites us to consider, thoroughly."

Of her own work, McCrickard, who is also a published writer, has the knack of articulating better than most, the new directions taking place in her busy studio. Drawing is at the centre of her practice. She is never without pad and pencil, on the metro, in local cafés, in museums and great exhibitions, on holiday with the family. These rapid life drawings enter the studio, some to become monotypes, others to inform the exacting process of making drypoints or to become painted versions within new narrative paintings.

“I want to put the human exchange into paint: our quirks, our oddness, our differences. I see the world through art historical images and in each work, there is always a prompt, something recognised from art history”.

McCrickard refers to her motley crew of odd characters as a display of human imperfection well suited to the gnarly surfaces in her paintings. We see this in the new small paintings of a child smoking, another reclining on a chair in a daydream – a daughter now become *la rêveuse* in a slippage from observation to type.

A set of monoprints introduce us to ‘Les Folles’, people deranged or mad, lost in the battle of life but who roam the city streets like ghosts. We all know them, but turn away. Artists such as Géricault and Goya looked at them with interest and compassion, as McCrickard does, seeing in them an aspect of the human condition that deserves attention. A remarkable set of small pencil drawings is also included in the exhibition, capturing the telltale signs of madness through the vacant look in their eyes.

There will be surprising interactions on the walls of the exhibition itself. Canvases, small drawings and prints, all reflecting the strongly independent vision of the artists, will reveal the dialogue bringing a fresh, stimulating group of works to a new audience.

[1] McCrickard, Kate: Welcome to the Jungle: Violence behind the Lines in the Art of Dasha Shishkin, *Art in Print Journal*, 2013

Kate McCrickard’s work is held in the British Museum, Pallant House Gallery, the Royal Scottish Academy, The New York Central Library, the Metropolitan Museum, the Los Angeles County Art Museum, De Reede Museum, Antwerp and in notable collections in Johannesburg, Paris and London.

Dasha Shishkin’s work is held in the Art Institute of Chicago; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Dallas Museum of Art; RISD Museum, Providence; Columbus Museum of Art, and in Germany works are held in the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Hamburger Kunsthalle; De Neue Museum, Nuremberg.

Gallery Hours: Wednesday – Saturday 12 – 6pm

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