

Robin F. Williams Your Good Taste Is Showing

October 12 – November 11, 2017
Opening Reception: October 12, 6-8 PM

P·P·O·W is pleased to present *Your Good Taste Is Showing*, a solo exhibition by Robin F. Williams. In her third exhibition with P.P.O.W, Williams extends her longstanding interest in gender roles to probe the strangeness of feminine identity in our current moment. The works bring together a variety of painting techniques, including oil, airbrush, and the staining of raw canvas, resulting in lush, deeply textured works. The complexity and variety of the medium reinforces layered narratives, reflecting the internal contradiction that Williams reveals in her subjects. The dissonance between perceived status, internal desires, and a need for self-expression is the framework for the exhibition.



The exhibition features works at the intersection of genre painting and portraiture; women in unexpected, awkward, and uncomfortable poses. These scenarios humorously explore the absurd standards to which women are still expected to conform. For this exhibition Williams turned to vintage advertising, particularly ads from the 70s, which drew on representational painting as a common aesthetic – a notion that fascinated her – and which sold to women sanctioned substitutes for their authentic desires. Williams began to cull together ads from the 70s that drew on art historical painting tropes; portraits of sexualized women selling a range of products, from cigarettes to shampoo.

Among the works on view will be *Your Good Taste is Showing*, a work inspired by a cigarette ad that appeared to be aping Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* but featured an African American model. Williams blended the image with Balthus' *Girl with Cat*, which she inverted and modernized, replacing the original subject's languid pose with an unflinching stare. The resulting work explores notions of race, class, and sexual agency; Williams places two cigarettes in the woman's hands, one of which appears to be giving the middle finger. The woman reclines effortlessly on a lounge, her underwear showing, overtly expressing the notion of desire that both the ad and the Balthus painting tried to covertly displace.

Also on view is *Burn*, a mixed media painting that features a sunburnt woman sitting uncomfortably on a gravestone, cigarette in hand. The work further conveys Williams' exaggerated use of texture – the subject's skin is described in rough, combed-through ridges of paint, sculpting the form and highlighting the damage done to the subject's body. In contrast, the background is airbrushed, mimicking the appearance of an ad in a glossy magazine. By complicating the texture of the work, Williams creates a visceral presence on the canvas, teasing out the tension between depth and illusion and lending the image physicality. With this work, Williams again explores how the notion of "feminine sexiness" actively contradicts the reality of female desire. Subverting two things often portrayed as sexy in an ad, sunbathing and smoking, Williams pushes them to their limits, rendering the death of a woman's attractiveness.

Through these works, Williams explores female sexuality, a notion paralleled in the motivation for marketing and advertising, which play on the commerciality of desire. Williams work explores the myriad manifestations of desire, and the tension between what her subjects feel internally and what they are told they are supposed to feel, between one's status as feminine and also having desire's of one's own – whether a job, power, or a sexual fantasy. Together the works sardonically explore the challenges that women face as they still feel compelled to disguise their desires, while also being authentic to themselves and eschewing societal standards. In her paintings, Williams asks the age old question 'what do women want?' On the faces and the bodies of her female subjects, the question seems rhetorical.

Robin F. Williams was born in Ohio in 1984 and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. She has been included in numerous exhibitions nationally and internationally. Williams has been honored as the Josephine Mercy Heathcote Fellow at The MacDowell Colony and the 2010 Brooklyn Academy "Playbill Artist."