

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS SOLO EXHIBITION FOR AWARD-WINNER ELIZABETH MALASKA

Psychologically probing paintings now on view by winner of the 2022 Betty Bowen Award for Pacific Northwest artists



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SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *Elizabeth Malaska: All Be Your Mirror* (November 17, 2023–June 16, 2024), the solo exhibition of the winner of the 2022 Betty Bowen Award, which honors a Northwest artist for their original, exceptional, and compelling work. In her paintings, Malaska responds to a history of Western art and power dynamics that often assigns women the roles of submissive accessories. In search of more potent feminine subjects, her work unpacks historical genres, such as the female nude, symbolically charged animals, and the artist and model in the studio.

Malaska has created four new large-scale paintings for this exhibition. Often inspired by poetry and music, the artist titled the show, as well as one of the paintings, *All Be Your Mirror*, a play on the 1967 song “I’ll Be Your Mirror” by the Velvet Underground and Nico. The exhibition explores ideas of mirroring and projecting in each individual work as well as in the relationships among the four paintings. The diptych *All Be Your Mirror* interrogates the traditional subject of the artist and model, with traditional gender dynamics of male artist and female model upended by an all-female cast. It shows the artist at her easel painting a nude, who appears reclining on a sofa, sketched on the canvas, and reflected in a mirror. The face of the artist as well as the figure of the model are sketchily articulated. Yet a glamorous dog—recalling those found in Western paintings of the aristocracy—is rendered in highly detailed brushstrokes and looks straight at the viewer. This difference, in addition to the appearance of contemporary commodities accenting the canvas, creates a sense of psychological tension.

In *The Doorway*, a nude woman stands in a balancing pose suggestive of a bather—a favorite topic of Western art—in the center of the canvas. Standing between a large painting and a mirror, with paint brushes and color samples at her feet, a baby crib to her left, and a cat carrying a kitten in its mouth in the corner, she is a woman at the nexus of competing values and roles: model, artist, and mother. Neither the painting nor the mirror offer a clear image or reflection, but instead frame the figure with shadows and abstract marks, underscoring the fluidity of roles and competing expectations. The paint bucket’s logo “Utrecht” points us to Netherlandish painting traditions, while the crib’s logo situates us in the here and now.

SAM

Like women, animals are often used as metaphors in Western history painting, symbolizing values ranging from seduction and sensuality to fidelity or imperial might. In *No Place in This Garden*, two snow leopards watch from an enclosed display. The animals' watchful stares and unnatural habitat ripple against the expectations and constraints imposed upon women. The angry roar of the pacing female expresses the strains of a nursing mother, as her male companion looks placidly at the viewer. And in *Mother*, a white cat, luminous against a bed of burgundy fabric, feeds her litter of kittens. She wears a direct facial expression that adds further nuance to ideas of nurturing and mothering.

"This is contemporary painting at its very best," says Catharina Manchanda, Jon and Mary Shirley Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. "The sophistication of Malaska's subjects, her nuanced and witty responses to the history of painting, and her deft handling of paint, all put her into a class of her own."

#### **ABOUT ELIZABETH MALASKA**

Elizabeth Malaska (b. 1978) is a painter from Portland. Recent group exhibitions include *Time Being* at Oregon Contemporary and *Making a Better Painting: Thinking Through Practice* at Lewis and Clark College. Her work is in the collections of The Portland Art Museum, The Hallie Ford Museum, and The Schneider Museum of Art. Malaska is a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow, as well as the recipient of fellowships from The Joan Mitchell and Hallie Ford Foundations. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from California College of the Arts and a Master of Fine Arts in Visual Studies from Pacific Northwest College of Art.

#### **ABOUT THE BETTY BOWEN AWARD**

Betty Bowen (1918–1977) was a Washington native and enthusiastic supporter of Northwest artists. Her friends established the annual Betty Bowen Award as a celebration of her life and to honor and continue her efforts to provide financial support to the artists of the region. Since 1977, SAM has hosted the yearly grant application process by which the selection committee chooses one artist from the Northwest to receive an unrestricted cash award, eligible to visual artists living and working in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

**Image credits:** *All Be Your Mirror*, 2023, Elizabeth Malaska, oil, flashe, mica and pencil on canvas over panel, 78 x 120 in. (in two separate panels 78 x 60 in. each), Courtesy of the artist. *Mother*, 2023, Elizabeth Malaska, oil, flashe, wax and pencil on canvas over panel, 50 x 72 in., Courtesy of the artist.

#### **ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM**

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.