

# JUXTAPOZ

Art & Culture

## Birthday: Bridget Mullen @ Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles

Sasha Bogojev | July 12, 2021

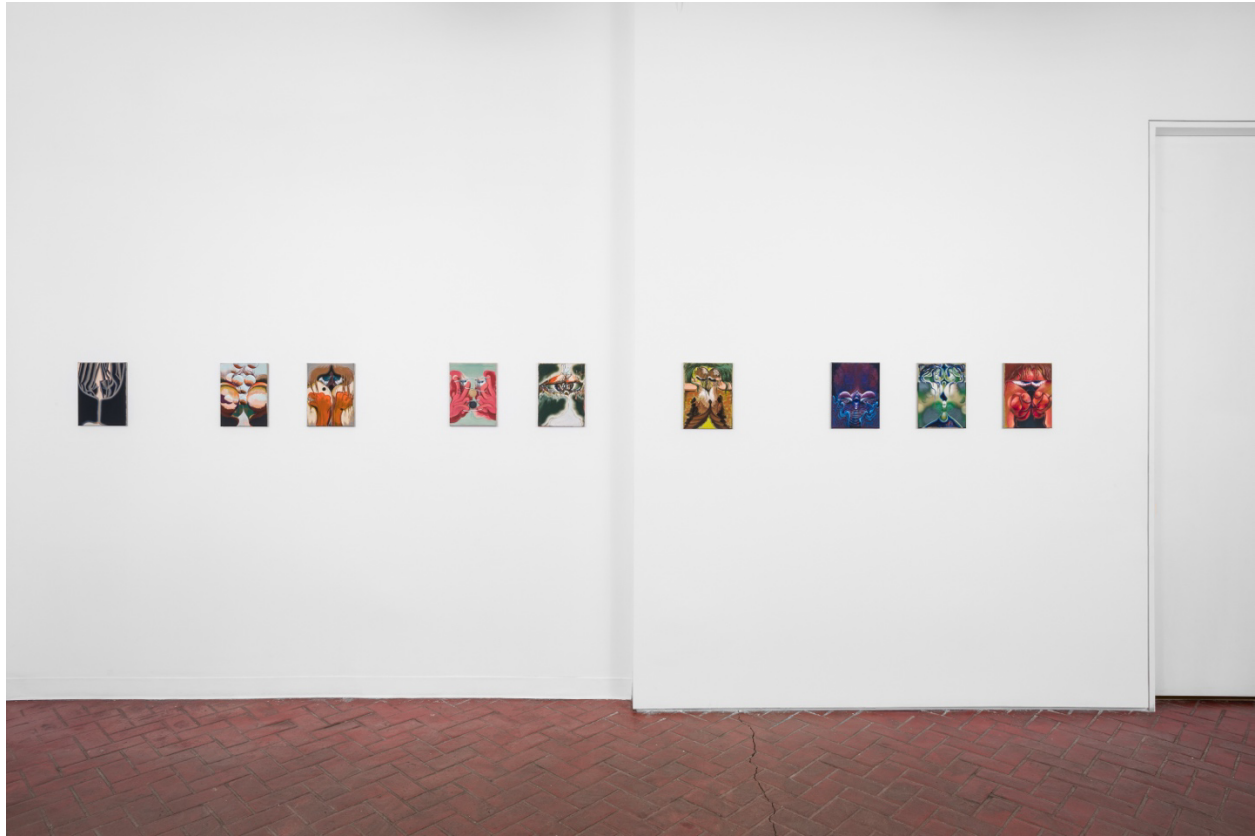
"In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud idealizes birth as a brief point of total oneness of the world," Brooklyn-based artist Michael Stamm stated in an essay he wrote for [Bridget Mullen's](#) solo debut which just opened at [Shulamit Nazarian](#) in LA. "Unpleasure and pain, our first and by no means last unwelcome feelings, introduce the border between ourselves and the external world." And this cosmic moment is the essence of the entire series comprising 32 iterative rectangle works which form *Birthday*, an exhibition that will stay on view from July 10th through August 28th.



*Birthday*, installation view, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, July 10 – August 28, 2021.  
Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian. Photo by Ed Mumford.

"These 32 head-sized paintings, from the series *Birthday*, appear at first as compressed faces but I like to think of them as portraits of mother and child - meditations on being held," the artist stated recently about this particular body of work. In an effort to portray one of the most universal moments each of us has endured, Mullen has set obvious limitations to her work. From insisting on the vertical orientation, the intimate scale of 12 x 9 inches, to the thematic hyper focus, the Brooklyn-based painter is left with experimentation in composition, color, and paint application in order to explore and epitomize the ultimate creative act. And through her process, she proves that less is indeed more, able to turn the fairly large selection of works into an exciting presentation through which these elements come to the full light. Starting with the two symmetric forms that evoke eyes, she then proceeds to construct the rest of the scene by adding both figurative and abstract aspects. Creating the tension directly with compositional approach, but also with the contrasting of colors as well as different ways of applying paint, the pieces vary significantly in their intensity and impact. Sometimes

depicting droopy, comic-like eyes, sometimes reducing them to mere dots, she seems to be exhausting the impact of pareidolia to its limitations. Often surrounding the only recognizable elements with abstract gestures, patterns, and/or shapes, Mullen is successfully conveying the surreal intensity of the transcending experience.



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"The paintings are always one absurdist step away from becoming something - an exasperated mom, a monkey shading his eyes with his hands, an art deco dog's butt," Stamm mentioned in his text, explaining the captivating nature of these puzzling visuals. "To understand one of Bridget's paintings is to delight in completing the exquisite corpse of a narrative it has passed one's way. Her play begets yours." And such a playful approach to creation comes from Mullen's interest in the exploration of all aspects of the medium. This can be seen in the ways she's capturing the moods through painstaking renditions or expressive gestures, confidently contrasting the light brushwork against intensely painted sections, or the way she's mixing and merging velvety, furry, bubbly, and any other surface she's forming along the way. At the same time, she's allowing for her inner maverick to come to the surface with the extraordinary color combinations or reinvention of set symmetry and just plain flaunting of the seemingly endless pool of ideas she's working from. And as much as each image is constructed from two halves that form a whole, a meditation on being held, a ying-yang of sorts, the tension of dichotomy permeates the entire body of work. Taking the viewer on a psychedelic rollercoaster ride from solidity to fluidity, representation to abstraction, it is also evoking or giving nods to a range of painterly styles, techniques, and movements at its peeking turns and loops.