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Visual Arts Review: Surrealist Showcase “All I Want is Boundless Love”

Fewer melting clocks for more maternal moons at Martha’s Contemporary

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There’s something healthy about each generation’s return to surrealism. The act of exploring the mystical, dreamlike realms of our subconscious feels akin to a spring cleaning. Artists tidy up the depths of society’s inner psyche to unveil the dusty cobwebs of time’s conditioning. And thanks to the artists showcased in “All I Want Is Boundless Love,” we’re revived from our winter slumber into a surreal spring, where mystical dreamlands, uncanny panoramas, and abstract mountainscapes rise like fresh awakenings.

Martha’s, known for curating emerging talent, has brought together three painters – Christina Attié Ballantyne, Ish Lipman, and Nour Malas – into their soon-to-be-renovated space on Guadalupe (we’ll have to wait till June for another show). The three distinct artists, all friends from their MFA days in Chicago, share not only a similar color palette but also a thematic affinity for something quiet, something unsettling. Their tendency toward surrealism, however, is not a reinterpretation of melting clocks or green apples for heads. Instead, it is a subtle, intuitive practice, building upon traditions of a past avant-garde.

And last, but certainly not least, is Malas. If Francis Bacon and Joan Mitchell had a child, it would be this Syrian-Canadian, New York-based artist. Originally a sculptor, her paintings lean more into abstraction than her peers with undulating mountainscapes of muted ochres and faint pinks. As seen in *On Melancholy Hill 2*, her landscapes are sculptural in nature, where the occasional body part can be spotted – perhaps fleshy thighs or a set of front teeth. It’s a game of *I Spy*, where Malas discreetly weaves these recognizable elements into abstract conglomerations. It’s smudged yet particular, intentional yet chaotic. As your eyes move across the chaos of the overlapping shapes, you’re

relieved by the emptiness of the canvas and reminded of something as simple as its thread count. But the break in color only allows you to quickly catch your breath before diving right back into the turbulence of her mountainous abstractions.

"All I Want Is Boundless Love" transcends the chaos of life beyond the gallery walls. Through surrealist and abstract practices, the three artists choose mystical worlds over our own – not as an escape, but as an invitation. If we choose to accept this invitation, perhaps shifting into an ethereal landscape can serve as a place of refuge, where engagement with our inner imagination can lead to a more conscious future. But I'll leave that to the painters – and Frank O'Hara, whose poem "Meditations in an Emergency" offers the show's titular phrase: *"I am the least difficult of men. All I want is boundless love."*