



Roberta Gentry: *The Walled Garden*
February 8 - April 12, 2024

Massey Klein Gallery is pleased to present *The Walled Garden*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Roberta Gentry. The exhibition will be on view from February 8th through April 12th. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, February 8th from 6-8pm. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. For press inquiries or questions regarding works available, please email info@masseyklein.com.

Roberta Gentry's work is inspired by the natural world's balance of order and chaos. Her paintings incorporate color and contrast as rhythmic elements, explore the connections and conflicts that occur between architecture and biology, and question the divide between natural and artificial.

The new paintings presented in *The Walled Garden* were created during the artist's pregnancy and in the days following the birth of her daughter. During this period, Gentry became interested in Marian art, with one 15th-century painting capturing her attention. *Madonna on a Crescent Moon in Hortus Conclusus*, painted by an unknown artist, features the Virgin Mary sitting in a *hortus conclusus* (Latin for walled garden) surrounded by stars with smaller figures in the foreground adoringly gazing up at her.

The idea of the Virgin Mary, a well-known fertility icon, as a living, breathing garden enclosed by a seemingly impenetrable wall, captured the artist's imagination and set off a new exploration into the boundaries architecture imposes on the natural world. Gentry imagined all the living things that could keep the Virgin Mary company inside her walled garden: birds, insects, various plants, maybe a snake.

Notions of the body as architecture and vice versa occupies the artist's mind while she works. Her larger paintings are more structural, with more room to explicitly explore the balance (and imbalance) of order and chaos. Her smaller paintings have become more botanical, more intimate, and closer to the ground. But for the last several years, her work has almost always featured symmetry. Sometimes her figures have roots, limbs, or even a flowering head, but they each represent a bi-lateral, symmetrical stability born from a central line or "spine." Is the body, in essence, a walled garden? And is it an impenetrable stone barrier or does it simply provide form and symmetry to compliment the biological, and at times celestial, world within it?

Gentry begins each painting with a grid and proceeds to grow and nurture each composition through it. Akin to gardening or weaving, the grid is important to the artist as a way to form the vertical and horizontal movements of the painting. Gentry often works with thin, washy acrylic, building up the surface of each painting with multiple translucent layers. In this way, she paints with openness and manipulates the experience of time. At any given point, one can see the beginning and the end of each painting, with each layer staying transparent enough that the canvas ground is always visible, even deep beneath the color.

Roberta Gentry received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in two-dimensional studies from the University of Arizona, and her Master of Fine Arts in painting from the State University of New York. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Ladies' Room LA, Elephant Art Space, and Joyce Goldstein Gallery, among others, and she has been featured in group exhibitions at Reynolds Gallery, My Pet Ram, Ruth Gallery, SCOTTY, and Bozomag, and elsewhere. Her work was recently featured in *Ghost Ship*, a group exhibition co-curated by Bozomag and Ramiro Hernandez at Massey Klein Gallery, on view from March 29th through May 11th, 2024.

Gentry curates exhibitions through Monte Vista Projects in Los Angeles, where she has been a member since 2015. Her work has been featured in publications such as *Voyage LA*, *Flaunt Magazine*, *Shoutout LA*, *Fabrik Magazine*, *LA Times*, and *Maake Magazine*. The artist lives and works in Los Angeles, California.