

LOS ANGELES I'M YOURS

A Word With Laura Krifka On Her *First Blush*



“These are my babies,” **Laura Krifka** says, motioning to her work, a collection of large paintings, sculptures, drawings, and a video recently up at Downtown’s **CB1 Gallery**. She has created the work over the past year, every piece full of artistic references and showcasing her simultaneously realistic and unrealistic looking cast of characters. The exhibition is entitled *First Blush* and is the Los Angeles solo debut of the twentysomething artist, a show that is less about the dainty wink of an eye and more about the crossed fingers behind someone’s back.

Krifka, who is a professor at **Santa Barbara City College**, is a tall blonde woman who you could describe as slightly goofy, a word used in the most endearing sense. She is quick to laugh and even quicker to make you laugh. “This is the second time I’ve shown my drawings,” she said as we enter the

space, her drawings framing the right side of the entry. She makes a silly “EEEEEEEEEEE” noise and gesticulates fake pain with her hands, alluding to the very recently removed workload that came with the arrival of the show.



“I spent a really long time making everything,” she says, noting that she had been working on all of the pieces in the show for about thirteen or fourteen months. Her pieces reflect a lot, from American mythology to fine art portraiture to fairy tales to high comedy and tragedy, expressed through multiple mediums. As you look at the paintings and sculptures in the gallery, a perfect pastoral soundtrack plays in the background, which is a part of her video piece but is quite the perfect audial setting for her show.

“I love art history,” she says, as she starts to speak on her sources. “A lot of times, I’m looking at old paintings and think, ‘Oh, I love that—I need to use that.’ and I build a painting around a gesture. Or, I’m a big history reader, and a lot of times I’ll be reading women pioneer journals and they will talk about how the women had to cross rivers with children in their arms, their dresses get sucked into the snowy water. I just thought, ‘Fuck: that needs to be a painting!’” She gestures to a piece behind her—seen below—which is that idea personified: the stresses and hijinks that entail crossing a river in a dress with small children.



Using these inspirations and sources, Krifka begins a very unique and interdisciplinary process that brings her to a painting. “I do a bunch of sketches and build a model,” she says. She points to one of her sculptures in the show. “These are sculptures but the models look just like this except they are made out of white clay that I put makeup on. They are destroyed in one day because they are only built for the paintings. I like building the models because I am a very visual person: I’m not good at just making stuff up. They give me a chance to put an arm like this or like that, etc.”

“I then put them in a diorama,” she continues. “I save vegetation and spray paint it with artificial stuff and I build these very elaborate sets. I light them and I take photographs of them, to find the best composition. Then, I start painting from the model so that I can get that very specific color as I am very interested in light and color.”



“It usually takes me anywhere from—shoot—a month to four months to finish a painting,” she finishes. Like CB1’s previously featured artist, **Lorenzo Hurtado Segovia**, Krifka’s process is very involved, detailed, and born from a relationship to art and history. “Each painting probably has a minimum of ten references from source material,” she says, solidifying her pieces ties to the past.

Even though her paintings and sculptures are tied to history and inspired by the past, they are creating new stories. “Narrative is a really big part of my work,” she says, “I’m very interested in the pregnant moment, the

moment right before something is going to happen. I feel like there are so many things that can lead into that one thing.”

She also would be bored if she created these situations in a hyper-realistic way. “There’s a real doughiness to my figures, which I find fascinating,” she explains. “If I paint something that looks exactly like a normal person—why? That seems really boring to me. I like adding the bulbous belly to my male figures and adding the most visually compelling things to my paintings.”



One that speaks to being a visually compelling pregnant moment is her painting *River Letch*, above. “The story with the *River Letch* painting, which I find fascinating, is that everyone thinks that the male figure is the leech—but the female figure is the leech,” she explains regarding the slightly comical but very serious painting. “People say, ‘Oh, he’s disgusting!’—but she has his clothes! She was egging him on! I think that’s kind of why I made the video, where you can see that the female characters are the bad characters. The males are bad, too, but the females are the ultimate bad characters.”

The video she made is a five minute stop animation piece that she shot and edited together herself. It took her three months to make and, like the soundtrack that fills the space, is what ties everything together, all the themes of *First Blush* crashing together in a flurry of male and female sexual tension and tragedy. The video, too, can be seen as both greatly

serious and somewhat comical, as it sees tiny clay figures without genitalia enacting rape scenes. This isn't anything new for Krifka though, who mentioned she was making stop motion videos since she was a teenager, specifically mentioning creating one about Christian Care Bears who went to San Francisco to turn all the gay people into Republicans.



“I’m really content driven,” she says, “People realize my pieces are beautiful and eventually find that they are uncomfortable. The video solidifies that thought. Showing things that are dirty in a sweet way opens up lots to the imagination.”

Krifka is an artist who works very visually, creating stories that are very upfront but often requiring a deeper look as the biggest stories are that which are omitted. Laura Krifka's *First Blush* will be up at CB1 through March 25 and will feature her artist's talk on March 18 at 3PM.













Studio photos courtesy of CB1 Gallery