

Walker Evans
/
Apolonia Sokol

PRESS RELEASE



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On the occasion of the second exhibition of ATTIC, we have the pleasure to present a confrontation between the work of young artist Apolonia Sokol, with the historical work of Walker Evans. The selected paintings of Apolonia Sokol, and the photography from Walker Evans' Cuba series both consist of snapshot portraits, presenting a common theme of documenting and capturing a moment in time.

TEXTS

1933: Walker Evans in Havana

Walker Evans is one of the photographers most responsible for the way we now imagine American life in the 1930s. His distinctive photographic style, which he declared "transcendent documentary", was nurtured by New York in the late 1920s but it was fully formed by his experience in another country – Cuba – in 1933.

In the spring of that year, Evans was asked by publisher J. B. Lippincott to produce a body of work about Cuba to accompany a book by the radical journalist Carleton Beals. This book, *The Crime of Cuba*, would be a scathing indictment of the then-current regime of Cuban President Gerardo Machado. He came into office in 1925, supported by the U.S. government, but became more dictatorial as the full force of the global depression hit Cuba. Evans wrote to a friend that he arrived in May "in the midst of a revolution." After years of civil strife in the country, Machado was forced from office in August, less than two months after Evans departed.

Text from the J. Paul Getty Museum

TEXTS

Carnivorous and haunted.

In 1890 Maurice Denis encouraged artists to "remember that a painting, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote" was "essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order". The 20th century painting, in large part, decided that the essence of painting was elsewhere than in the images, and often renounced them. But there was a misunderstanding (the fact that this misunderstanding has, from Kandinsky to Mondrian, Rothko and Newman, produced absolute wonders, does not change the case): images continue to obsess painters, and will no doubt continue to do so for a long time to come. Can one reasonably argue that it is inessential, for a figurative painter, to choose the representation of a woman rather than that of a horse? This would mean that the subject of the image outweighs the thousand meanings, which any image carries... No woman, and, as far as one can speculate, no horse, would obviously accept this idea.

The painted images, to speak only of those, are always both material (pigments, binders, a surface) and memory (the memory of all of our lives), linked to a specific alchemy, that of the mad ones who persist in sheltering their desire of the world within these few square centimeters (or square meters) of cloth that we call paintings. Apolonia Sokol controls in an admirable way, despite her young age, the alchemy in question. Her paintings are most often portraits of her entourage; however we would be wrong in seeing them only as episodes in a chronicle of our time, snapshots of Paris, Los Angeles, New York or Brussels.

Behind the effigy of a young woman in the bath, you sense, as you would guess the hidden foundations of a building, a film by Buster Keaton, but also David's *The Death of Marat*, Bonnard's bathtubs, and even the Venuses of the Renaissance. Behind the silhouette of an artist, the admirable pose of *The teacher in Blackboard* by Winslow Homer, behind *Petit Peintre*, the touching astonishment of the boy in *A Child with a Teetotum*, by Chardin... The most commonplace of scenes, in the lens of the eye and the hand of Apolonia Sokol, are loaded with the full thickness of a memory, the intact recollection of hundreds of images that inhabit the artist's head. Even the abstract background of the paintings seems to conceal phantoms. "There's a woman under there", would have exclaimed the protagonists of *The Unknown Masterpiece* (the short story

TEXTS

of Balzac that depicts a painter so enamored of his model that he ends up creating a pandemonium of lines from which emerges with the miraculous grace of an apparition, the perfect image of a single body part). With Apolonia Sokol, it is on that note often literally true that there is "a woman under there". Many of her paintings have been re-painted on canvases, unfinished or discarded, which continue to appear through the finished compositions - needless to say, these paintings more often depict women than horses, and it is not just a matter of epoch...

In the figure gallery of Sokol we find a young New Yorker whose body is covered in tattoos: the lovers of painting will immediately recognize a nod to the painting by Otto Dix, *Zuleika, the Tattooed Wonder*, or *Portrait of Egon Erwin* by Christian Schad. But others will see, simply, and no less precisely, the delicate image of a young man, as one can meet many today, which does exist, and who has decided to make his body a sort of private museum. There are a lot of tattooed models in the work of Apolonia Sokol, and it's undoubtedly not a coincidence. The popularity of tattooing is universal today, or nearly so, and it happens to be contemporary with the massive dissemination of digital images on touch screens and mobile phones; as if the instinct of young people, who are the main consumers of these smooth and fleeting images, caused them to powerfully embody certain figures or certain motifs by engraving them forever on their bodies.

The fury of painting of Apolonia Sokol belongs precisely to this time where images are endangered by their abundance, their fluidity and their disembodiment. The project of the artist, deliberate or not, is to give flesh to the images, to shape them in the chemistry of pigments, to offer to the desire of the spectator - a lover of painting is always a voyeur - images made of the same material as the world around us, and the memory of the world that we are forgetting. Her painting is ambitious, voluntary and voracious, but also scholarly, subtle and refined. *Carnivorous and haunted*, that is to say: scandalously seductive, as would a femme fatale, and full of promise.

Didier Semin, February 2016

BIOGRAPHY

Walker Evans (1903 - 1975) was an American photographer best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) documenting the effects of the Great Depression. Many of his works are in the permanent collections of museums and have been the subject of retrospectives at such institutions.

Apolonia Sokol (Born in 1988), lives and works between Paris and New York. She studied painting at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris.

www.apoloniasokol.com

TEXT (French)

Carnassière et hantée.

C'est en 1890 que Maurice Denis a incité les artistes à « se rappeler qu'un tableau, avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote », était « essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées ». Le XXe siècle pictural a, pour une large part, décidé que l'essence de la peinture était ailleurs que dans les images, et souvent a renoncé à ces dernières. Mais il y a eu malentendu (que ce malentendu ait, de Kandinsky à Mondrian et Rothko ou Newman, produit d'absolues merveilles, ne change rien à l'affaire) : les images continuent d'obséder la peinture, et continueront sans doute à le faire longtemps. Peut-on raisonnablement soutenir qu'il soit inessentiel, pour un peintre figuratif, de choisir la représentation d'une femme plutôt que celle d'un cheval ? Cela voudrait dire que la matière de l'image l'emporterait sur les mille significations dont toute image est chargée ... Aucune femme, et, pour autant qu'on puisse le conjecturer, aucun cheval, n'accepterait évidemment cette idée.

Les images peintes, pour ne parler que de celles-là, sont toujours et de la matière (des pigments, des liants, une surface en effet) et de la mémoire (la mémoire de toutes nos vies), liées dans une alchimie spécifique, celle des fous qui s'obstinent à mettre leur désir du monde à l'abri dans ces quelques centimètres (ou quelques mètres) carrés de toile qu'on appelle tableaux. Apolonia Sokol maîtrise admirablement, en dépit de son jeune âge, l'alchimie en question. Ses toiles sont le plus souvent des portraits de son entourage : mais on aurait tort de n'y voir que les épisodes d'une chronique de notre temps, des instantanés de Paris, Los Angeles, New York ou Bruxelles.

Derrière l'effigie d'une jeune femme au bain, on sent, comme on devinerait les fondations cachées d'un édifice, un film de Buster Keaton, mais aussi le David de *La Mort de Marat*, les baignoires de Bonnard, et même les Vénus de la Renaissance. Derrière la silhouette d'une artiste, la pose admirable de *l'institutrice du Blackboard* de Winslow Homer, derrière un *Petit peintre*, l'émouvant étonnement de *L'Enfant au Toton*, de Chardin ... La plus banale des scènes, au prisme de l'œil et de la main d'Apolonia Sokol, se charge de toute l'épaisseur d'une mémoire, du souvenir intact des centaines d'images qui peuplent la tête de l'artiste. Même le fond abstrait des tableaux semble dissimuler des fantômes. « Il y a une femme

TEXT (French)

là-dessous », se seraient écriés les protagonistes du Chef d'œuvre inconnu (la nouvelle de Balzac qui met en scène un peintre tellement épris de son modèle qu'il finit par créer un embrouillamini de lignes d'où émerge, avec la grâce miraculeuse d'une apparition, l'image parfaite d'un seul fragment de corps). Chez Apolonia Sokol, il est d'ailleurs souvent et littéralement vrai qu'il y ait « une femme là-dessous ». Nombre de ses tableaux ont été repeints sur des toiles, inachevées ou désavouées, mais qui continuent de transparaître dans les compositions abouties – ces toiles représentaient plus souvent, inutile de le préciser, des femmes que des chevaux, et ce n'est pas qu'une affaire d'époque...

Dans la galerie des figures de Sokol on trouve un jeune New Yorkais dont le corps est couvert de tatouages : les amateurs de peinture y reconnaîtront immédiatement un clin d'œil au tableau d'Otto Dix, *Zuleika la merveille tatouée*, ou au *Portrait d'Egon Erwin* par Christian Schad. Mais les autres y verront, simplement, et pas moins justement, l'image sensible d'un jeune homme, comme on peut en rencontrer beaucoup aujourd'hui, qui existe bel et bien, et qui a décidé de faire de son corps une sorte de musée privé. Il y a beaucoup de modèles tatoués chez Apolonia Sokol, et ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard. La vogue du tatouage est aujourd'hui universelle ou peu s'en faut, et elle se trouve être contemporaine de la diffusion massive des images numériques sur les écrans tactiles et les téléphones portables : comme si l'instinct des jeunes gens, qui sont les principaux consommateurs de ces images lisses et fugaces, les poussait à puissamment incarner certaines figures ou certains motifs en les inscrivant à tout jamais dans leur corps.

La rage de peindre d'Apolonia Sokol appartient précisément à ce temps où les images sont mises en péril par leur abondance, leur fluidité et leur désincarnation. Le projet, délibéré ou non, de l'artiste, est de redonner de la chair aux images, de les modeler dans la chimie des pigments, d'offrir au désir du spectateur – un amateur de peinture est toujours un voyeur – des images faites de la matière même du monde qui nous entoure, et de la mémoire du monde que nous sommes en train d'oublier. Sa peinture est ambitieuse, volontaire et vorace, mais elle est également érudite, subtile et raffinée. *Carnassière et hantée*, c'est-à-dire : scandaleusement séduisante, comme le serait une femme fatale, et riche de promesses.

Didier Semin, Février 2016

EXHIBITION' S VIEWS



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WORKS AVAILABLE - Walker Evans



Walker Evans
Citizen in Downtown Havana, 1933



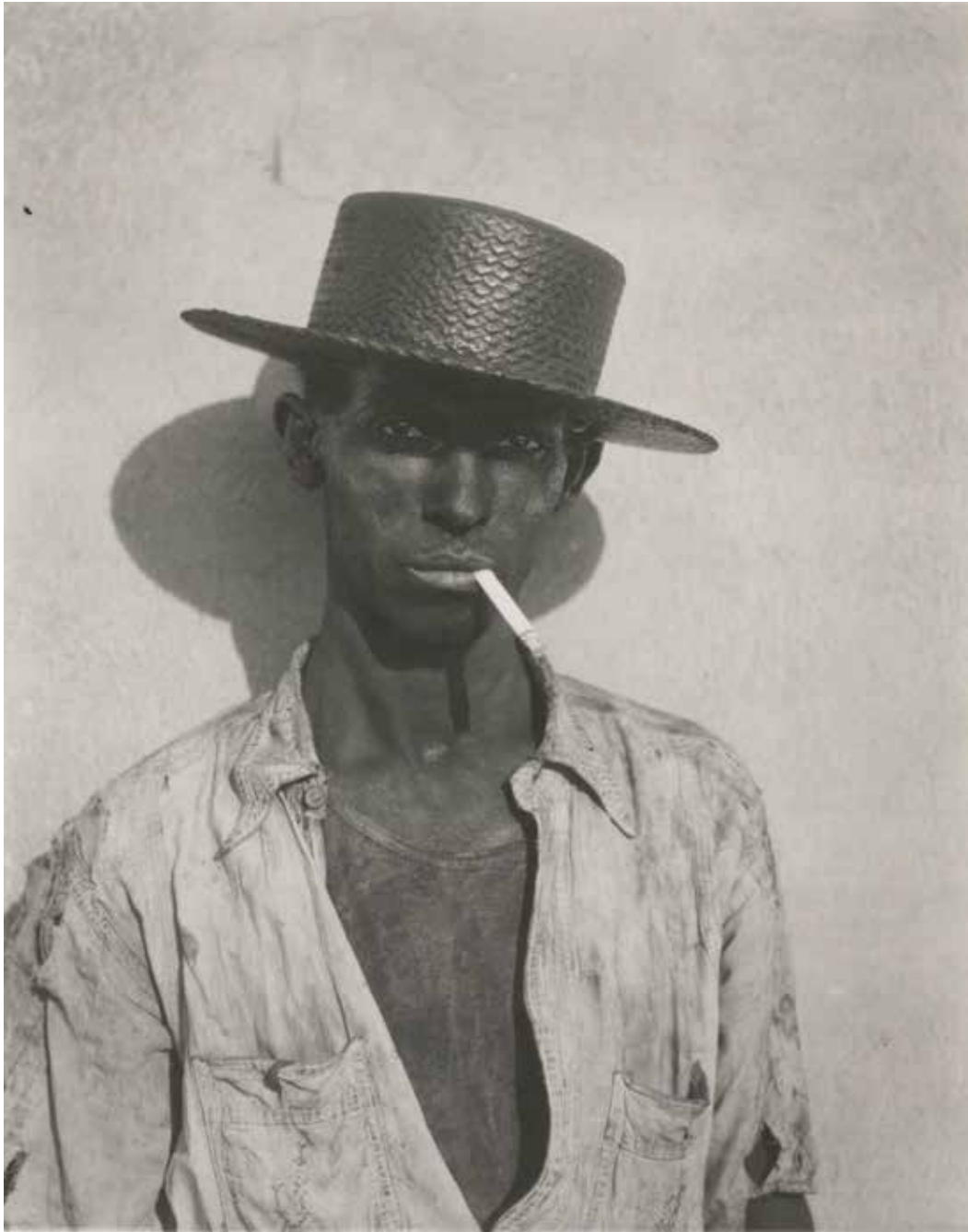
Walker Evans
Barber Shop Scene, 1933



Walker Evans
Shoemaker, 1933

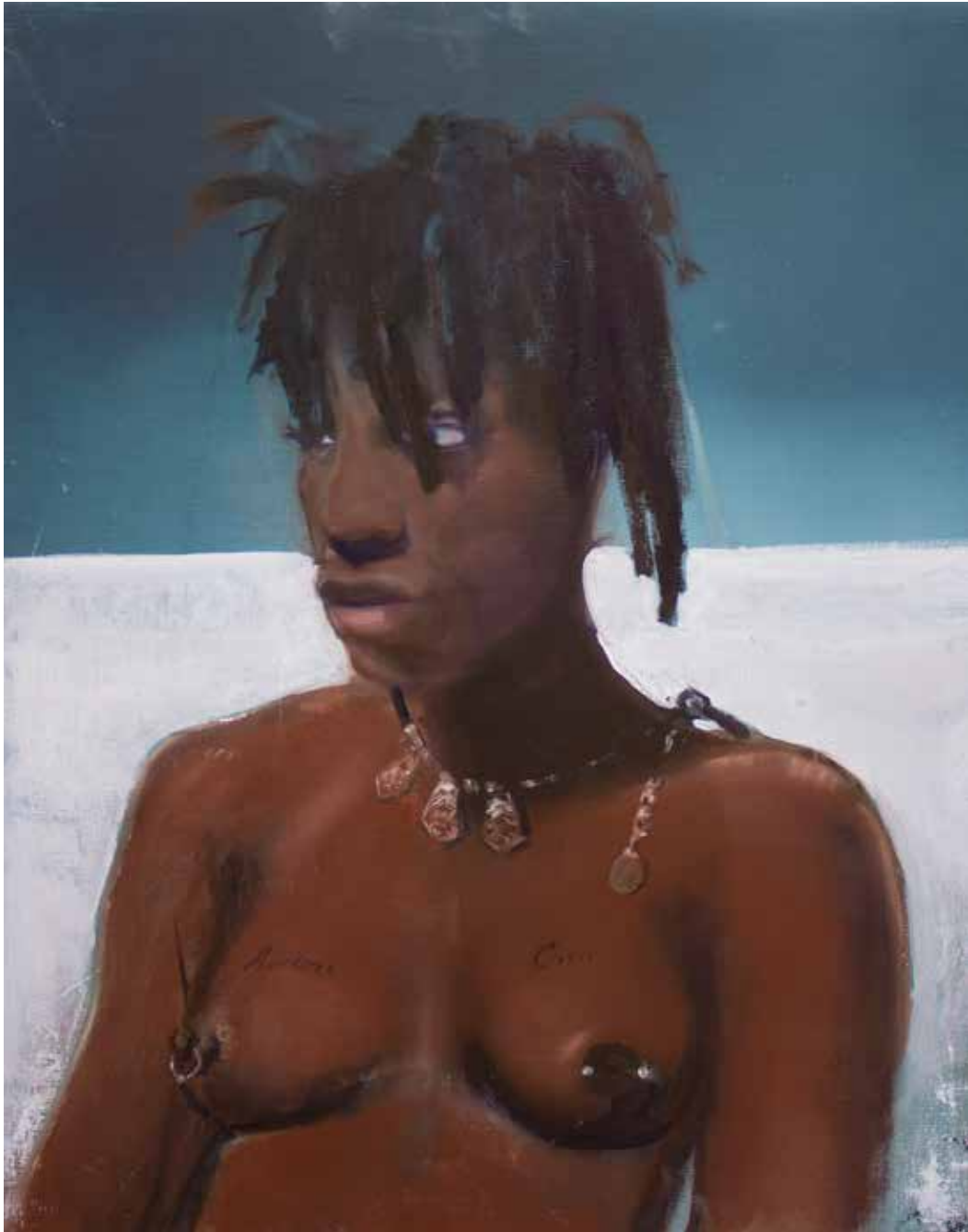


Walker Evans
Woman, 1933



Walker Evans
Coal Stevedore, Havana, 1933

WORKS AVAILABLE - Apolonia Sokol



Apolonia Sokol
MILKA-CONGOLESE PUNK IN BRUSSELS, 2016
oil on linen, 50 x 60 cm (23.6 x 19.6 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
ME-NOSE, 2016
oil on linen, 35 x 27 cm (11.8 x 19.6 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
BABY-GREEN, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
KYLE, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.3 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
GREENCARD, 2015
oil on linen, 50 x 60 cm (23.6 x 16.6 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
PINK-BANANA, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
DREAM, 2016
oil on linen, 40 x 30 cm (15.7 x 11.8 inches)



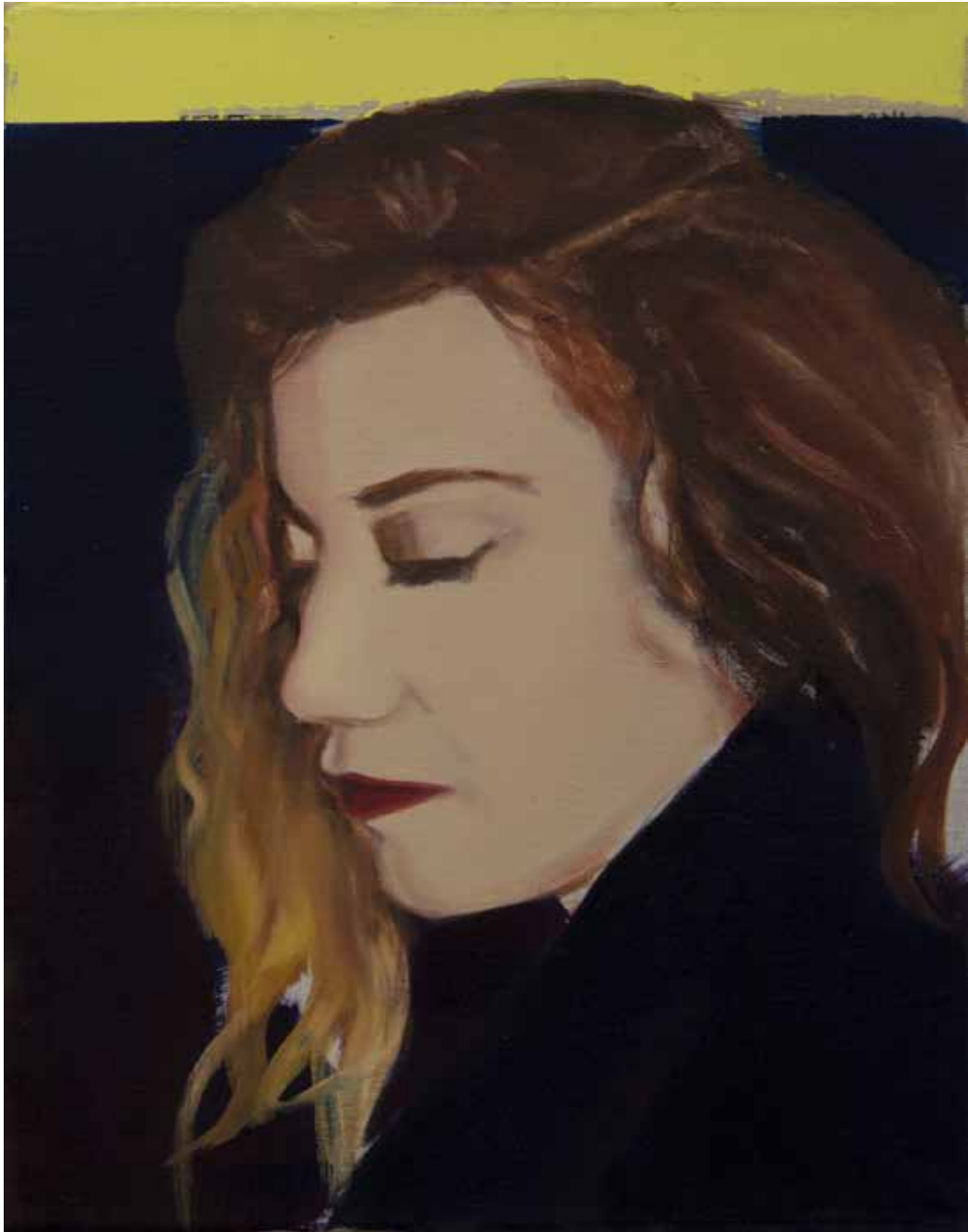
Apolonia Sokol
COCO-MAC, 2016
oil on linen, 35 x 27 cm (11.8 x 19.6 inches)



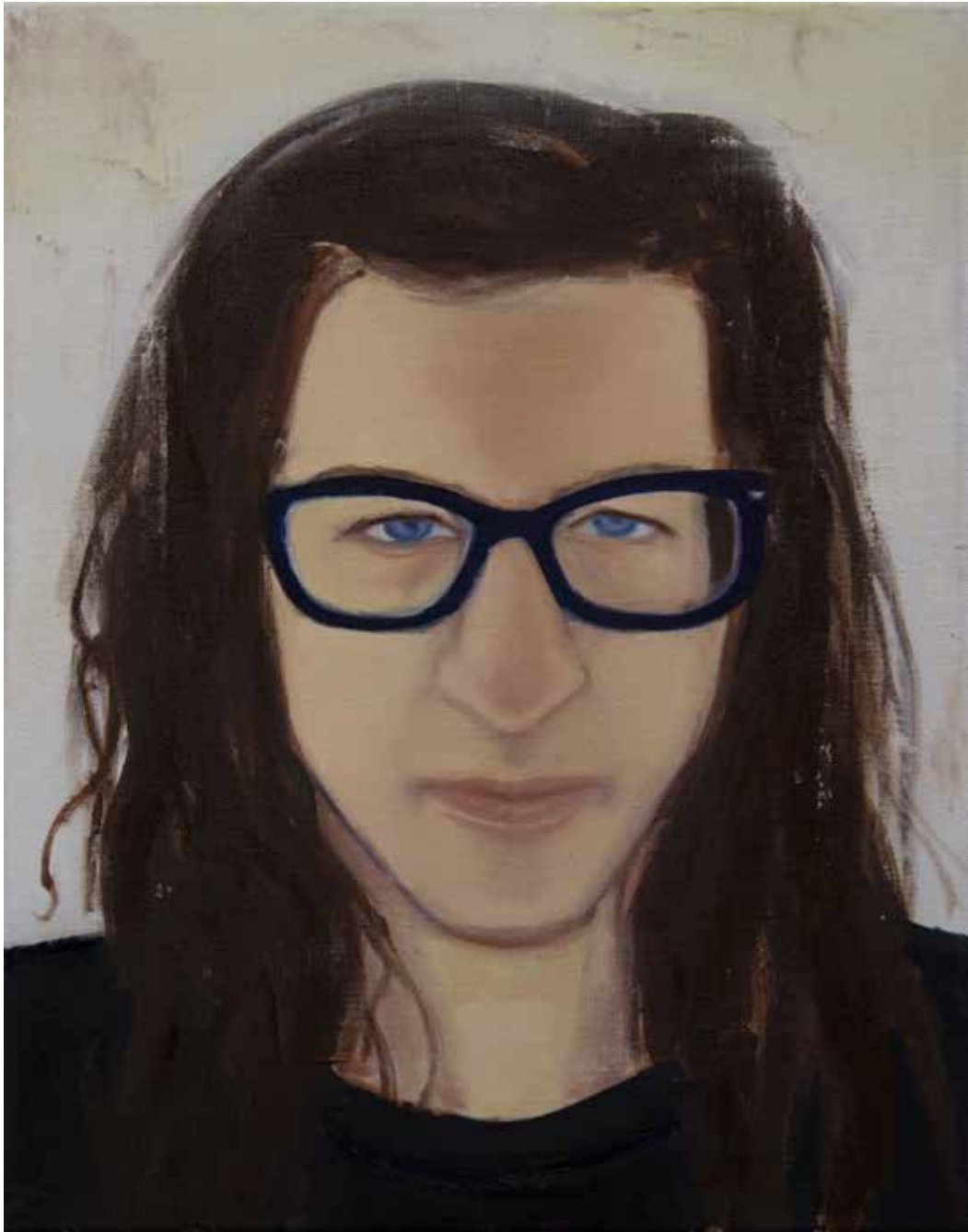
Apolonia Sokol
RYAN-CHIRI, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
MOMMA-GOMEZ, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
LILY-BLUE, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
ANDREW-WRITES, 2016
oil on linen, 29 x 39 cm (15.4 x 11.4 inches)



Apolonia Sokol
LOUP, 2015
oil on linen, 46 x 33 cm (18.11 x 12.9 inches)