



Untitled

Critchlow, Somaya

Not on display

Title/Description: Untitled

Artist/Maker: Critchlow, Somaya (Artist)

Born: 2019

Measurements: Unframed h. 960 x w. 670 x d. 20 mm Framed: h. 1000 x w. 710 x d. 40 mm

Accession Number: 50856

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Credit Line: Donated by the Green Family Art Foundation courtesy of Adam Green Art Advisory, and a private patron, 2021

Somaya Critchlow's practice began in self-portraiture when she was studying at the Royal Drawing School. Now, she creates fictional characters often inspired by women seen in popular culture, whether reality TV or music videos. As Amanda Renshaw writes, 'Critchlow has also turned the mirror on herself and confronted the subject head on. However, her physical likeness is often just a jumping off point. She has held up the mirror and passed through it.' [1]

This painting depicts a nude woman wearing a glamorous blonde wig. She rests her head on her shoulder with her hand on her hip in a mannerism that is clearly posed for the viewer whilst she confidently returns their gaze. Though Critchlow's practice is based on simply painting what she knows, she acknowledges that painting Black women is, in itself, a political act.

The woman is presented on a deep green ground, which is simultaneously neutral, and a nod to the wall colours of traditional galleries on which history painting is often shown. Throughout her practice, Critchlow shows an awareness of European art history, particularly portrait painting, with inspirations ranging from Joshua Reynolds to Paula Rego. Through her technique and subject matter, Critchlow has developed a style that is uniquely her own.

Some of Critchlow's paintings include clothing or furniture, rooting them at a specific period, whilst this painting may be timeless. It was first exhibited in Critchlow's exhibition *Underneath a Bebop Moon*, the title of which refers to the early form of jazz music. The exhibition was in 2020, opening after the coronavirus lockdown. In conversation with the artist Tschabalala Self, Critchlow said of that time, 'I think a lot of world events have, for me, kind of reinvigorated the basis of my work; that there is a need to view things in a new way and question what you think you "know"'. [2]

A smaller version of this painting is in the collection of the RISD Museum, Rhode Island though in that painting, the woman is adorned with leopard spots. The smaller scale is characteristic of Critchlow's earlier work, and the Sainsbury Centre painting is one of the first she made on the larger, medium-size canvas.

Tania Moore, April 2023

[1] Amanda Renshaw, *Somaya Critchlow: Paintings* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2021), p.10.

[2] Somaya Critchlow in Somaya Critchlow and the Erotics of Projection, *Office Magazine*
<http://officemagazine.net/somaya-critchlow-and-erotics-projection?page=1> accessed 24 April 2023.

Exhibitions

'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', Hayward Gallery, London (9.9.21-12.12.21)

'Somaya Critchlow: Underneath a Bepop Moon', Maximillian William, London, 18/06/2020 - 15/08/2020

Further Reading

Amanda Renshaw, *Somaya Critchlow: Paintings* (Milan: Skira, 2021), p.71.
