I have witnessed a recurring trend while attending numerous Kate Domina openings. As patrons continuously swell through the doors of the gallery, they circle the space like hungry sharks, gliding from painting to painting as they search for their favourite to buy. Many times over the course of the night, attendees will bid on a piece at the same time, resulting in a rivalry that dissipates only after the artist agrees to do a commission for the unlucky duck who leaves the gallery empty-handed. Domina's figurative oil paintings have struck a chord with many Torontonian collectors. Beautifully uncomforting, Kate pulls viewers into her fantastical world of antlered children, candy-haired ladies casting suspicious glances, and star-crossed lovers.

A quiet neurosis seeps its way into your brain after time spent with her wide-eyed portraits. A freaky and perhaps sinister presence belies the artist's choice of soft palettes, doe-eyed femmes, and heart-shaped glasses. Light and whimsical but never superficial, the world according to Miss Domina is beyond intriguing and undeniably striking. Working out of a studio apartment in Parkdale, her practice has evolved from a self-taught DIY attitude and a passion for poetry (Ann Sexton, Patti Smith, and Krishnamurti remain her top favourites) to psychoanalysis, feminism, and the surreal. Kate brightens up Toronto's art scene with her quirky sense of humour and deeply personal expressions of love and life.

Kate has been drawing and painting for as long as she can remember. In her first grade notebooks she, filled the pages with drawings of ballerinas - girls with round circle heads, elongated necks, and feet pointed downward. With an illustrative technique evolving out of impressionism and pop surrealism, Kate has developed a creative practice that meditates on buried memories of her youth. "Children are unapologetically animals," explains Kate. "They are purer breeds and darker minds, and there is no better vehicle to understanding the human condition than through the eyes and disposition of the young". Putting herself into the headspace of a child, she intuitively paints while a surrealist image appears to her. It is interesting to note that over the years, her subjects have gradually gotten older and her technique more refined, as she continues to push herself to reach an abstractly primitive space.

Purer breeds and darker minds.

I ask Kate about the repetition of antlers in her work, which she also has tattooed on her forearm. "My dad use to call my sister and me little Vikings" she shares. During her initial efforts to tap into her childhood recollections, she painted a portrait of her and her sister wrapped together in a blanket wearing Viking horns. Since that first painting, the image of the horns has taken an anamorphic style, evolving into a hybrid form of tree branches and antlers. And with each question I pose to Kate about the details in her paintings, the more she shares her personal life with me. Objects, jewellery, and even eyes and lips in her paintings are highly representational and plucked from the deep and dark cloisters of her psyche. An open book, Kate is candid about the content of her work and her unique process. And we are hungry to learn more about this fascinating creature.

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