



BEYOND BELIEF:
PORTRAITS OF UNCERTAINTY
LAURA WOERMKE

© Image copyright 2024 Laura Woermke

No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the artist.

This catalog is to commemorate the exhibition, *Beyond Belief: Portraits of Uncertainty* by
Laura Woermke at Central Studio, London, Ontario , October 5 to 26, 2024.

Design: Laura Woermke

Essay: *Nida Home Doherty, first published on Centred.ca*

Photography: Paul Lambert

Front: *Untitled, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2024*

Exhibition sponsored by Elgin Contracting and Restoration Ltd.

BEYOND BELIEF:
PORTRAITS OF UNCERTAINTY
LAURA WOERMKE

Image: #12, Acrylic on canvas, 6' x 4', 2024

Laura Woermke – Beyond Belief

by Nida Home Doherty

Laura Woermke has served as curator and director of the St. Thomas-Elgin Art Gallery in St. Thomas for over 17 years. In her role as curator, she has cultivated a reputation across Southwestern Ontario for thoughtful, innovative exhibitions that resonate deeply within the community. Gerald Pedros, a long-time St. Thomas resident and prominent regional artist, describes Woermke as “a true motivator in bringing the gallery to a place of relevance in Elgin County.”

However, Woermke's connection to the arts extends well beyond her curatorial role. A seasoned artist herself, she has honed her techniques and vision, primarily in painting, since her formative years at Fanshawe College in the early 1990s and her first solo exhibition in 2001.

Her latest exhibition, *Beyond Belief: Portraits of Uncertainty*, currently at Central Studio in London, ON, represents the culmination of two years of work. In these paintings, Woermke merges her curatorial insights with her distinct artistic style to challenge both the conventional approach to viewing art and the viewer's understanding of what is being seen.



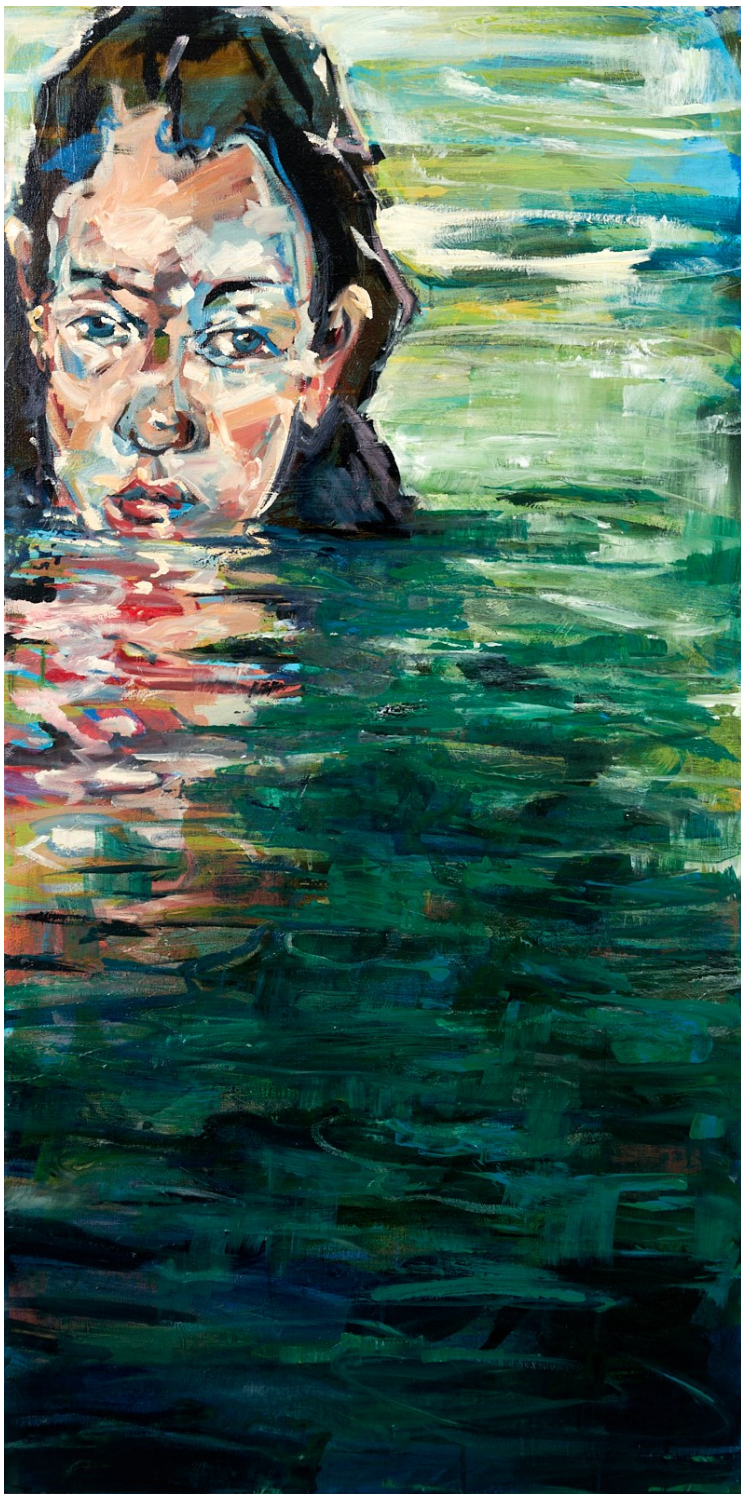
Image: #13, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 40", 2024



Typically, when a viewer enters an exhibition space, they expect to view each artwork in isolation, moving from piece to piece around the space. However, Woermke's exhibition, which features twelve medium-sized mixed-media paintings, accompanied by a significant number of smaller pieces, disrupts this notion. Here, it is the collective impact of the works that is crucial to appreciating the work, drawing viewers toward the larger narrative that is woven through the individual pieces and only reveal their full depth when considered as a whole.

Each painting portrays a woman—often a young woman – where the focus is on her face while the rest of her body is submerged in murky water. In this context, Woermke reclaims a convention of painting the female figure under the male artist's gaze. Traditionally idealized in Western art—from Renoir's muses, to Degas' ballet dancers, to Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*—such portrayals have sought to capture the female figure as an object of beauty and innocence. In contrast, Woermke subverts this convention. In these paintings the women are not passive objects of beauty. Instead, they confront the viewer with distorted expressions layered

Image: #9, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48" x 24", 2024



with thick, harsh brush strokes that convey a message of inward trauma. The female subjects' gaze are slightly averted, so the viewer is able to stand as a voyeur in a "peeping Tom" scenario (in Sartre's sense), and gaze into the bruised faces, attempting to discern the inner lives, the haunting message behind the surface of these women mired in the depths of ... something; something unknowable.

Woermke's style recalls the psychologically charged work of South African artist Marlene Dumas, known for her portraits that explore her subjects and their inner lives. Similarly, Woermke's figures suggest an inner landscape. In this case, it is inner lives fraught with uncertainty, struggling to remain afloat. Innocence and beauty are given over to brutal bruising. Woermke describes her work "as distorted and brutally honest depictions" reflecting the harsh social environment that women, particularly young women, are living in. "Using an unrealistic palette to portray flesh," Woermke writes, "one is left with the feeling of bruised, stained, and broken." In effect, there is a palatable sense of raw vulnerability that permeates the exhibition.

In her artist statement, Woermke refers to these portraits as self-portraits, reflective of her own journey. "As I delved into my own artistic practice, I began to see uncertainty as a mirror, reflecting the turbulent waters of my own inner landscape," she writes. However, through these works, she explores themes that resonate deeply in the lives of women today, engaging the viewer in a dialogue about identity, struggle, and self-perception.

As I moved through the exhibition, I found myself contemplating the complex inner worlds of young women today. The figures Woermke paints are neither reaching out nor fighting back. But they do appear like they are passively drowning. I have the strong impulse to reach out, to pull them out of the prevailing darkness and shake them back to life. If indeed swimming in a quagmire of uncertainty is the theme, these women seem to be unconsciously overwhelmed by it.

Unlike Edvard Munch's visceral *The Scream*, Woermke conveys a muted calling out to the viewer, silenced by the surroundings that engulf them, sinking without struggling. In one particularly poignant image, labeled #13, the figure is almost completely submerged, encased in her own psychological murkiness.

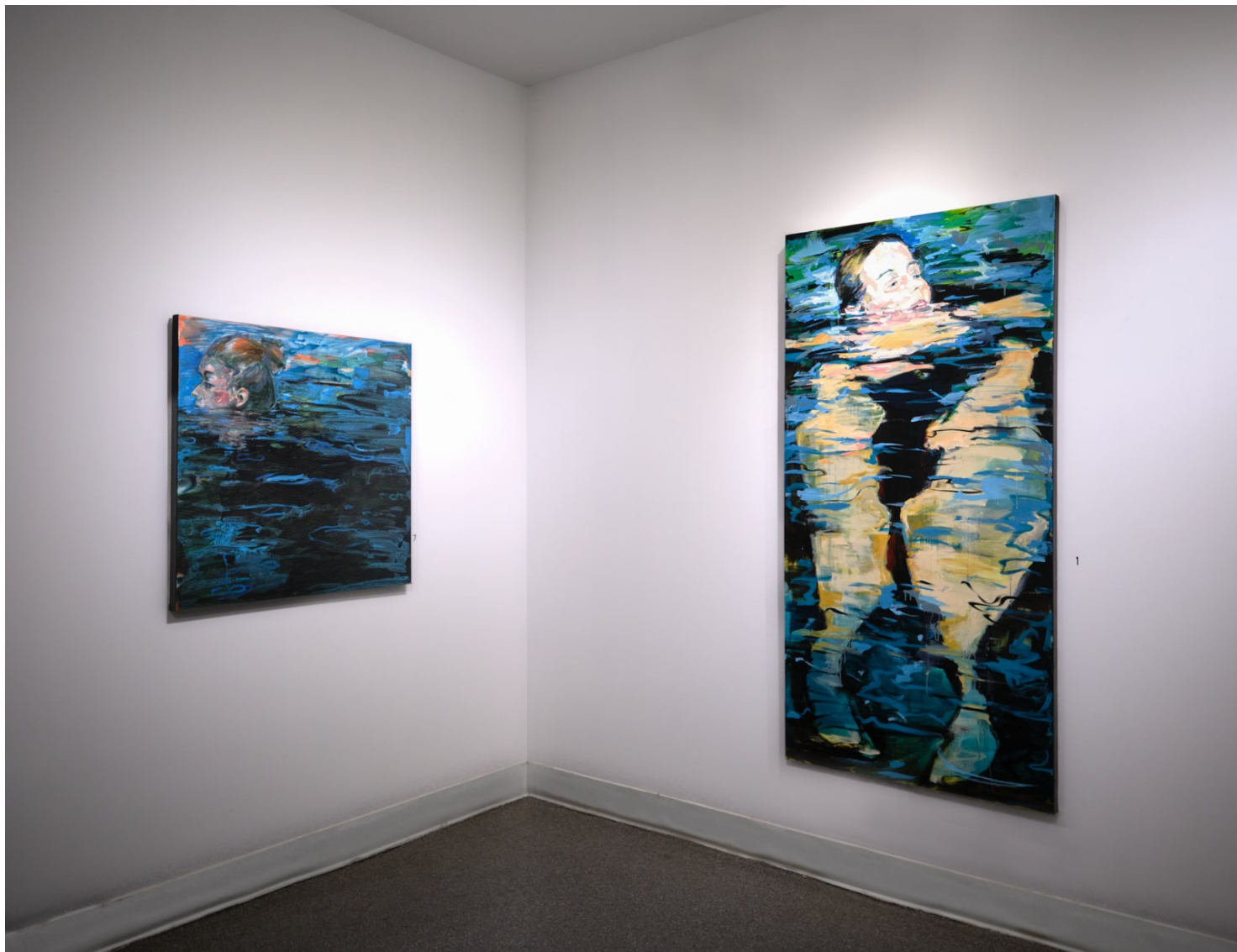
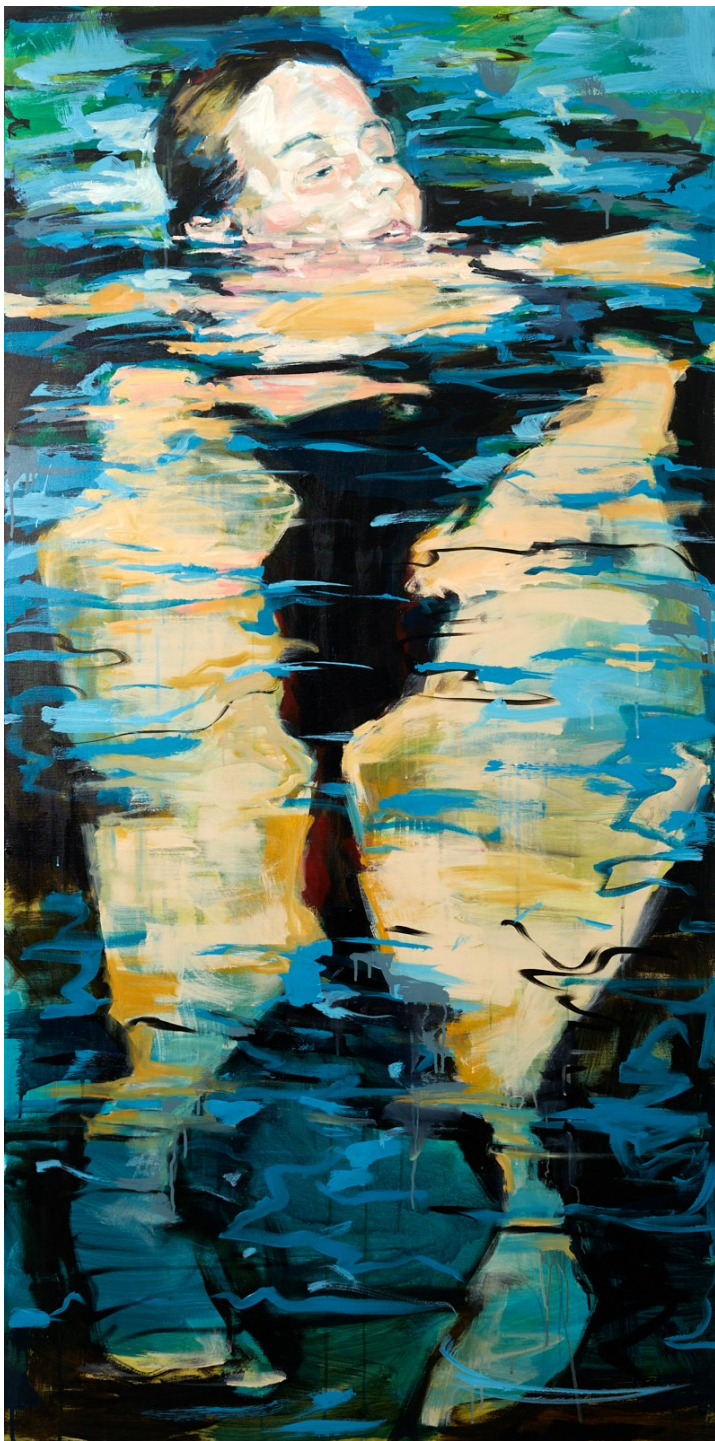


Image: #1, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 6' x 4', 2024



In *Beyond Belief: Portraits of Uncertainty*, Woermke taps into a growing theme that feels sharply relevant. We are living through an era of profound global uncertainty—political, economic, environmental, and social. For young women especially, the pressure to navigate this uncertain terrain might appear insurmountable. It has become increasingly difficult to have faith in the future and to clearly see one's role in it. In a world filled with uncertainty, how will we stay afloat? How do we confront the forces that threaten to pull us under?

Woermke suggests a path forward in her artist's statement, calling upon the resilience of the human spirit. It is a perspective that elevates the place of the artist in humanity. She writes, "By embracing the unknown, we open ourselves up to a world of possibility, to a deeper understanding of the human experience, and to [see] the profound beauty that can be found in the midst of uncertainty."

It is a perspective that resonates throughout the exhibition, offering a contemplative look at the precarious moment between surrender and survival.

Nida Home Doherty lives between London Ontario, and Montreal. Through her previous arts writing she has been able to establish Centred.ca, the only arts focussed magazine in Southwestern Ontario.

Image: #6, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 40", 2024



Image: #2, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48" x 20", 2024

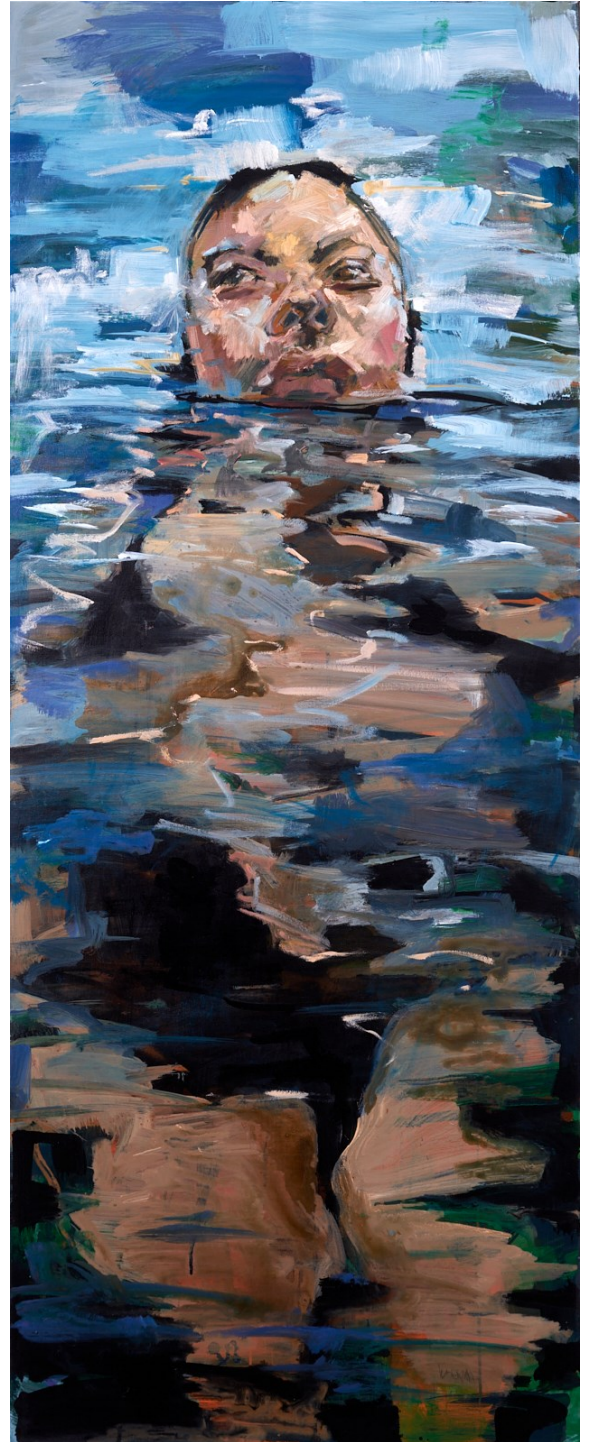


Image: #10, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2024



Image: #11, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2024



Image: *Untitled*, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2024

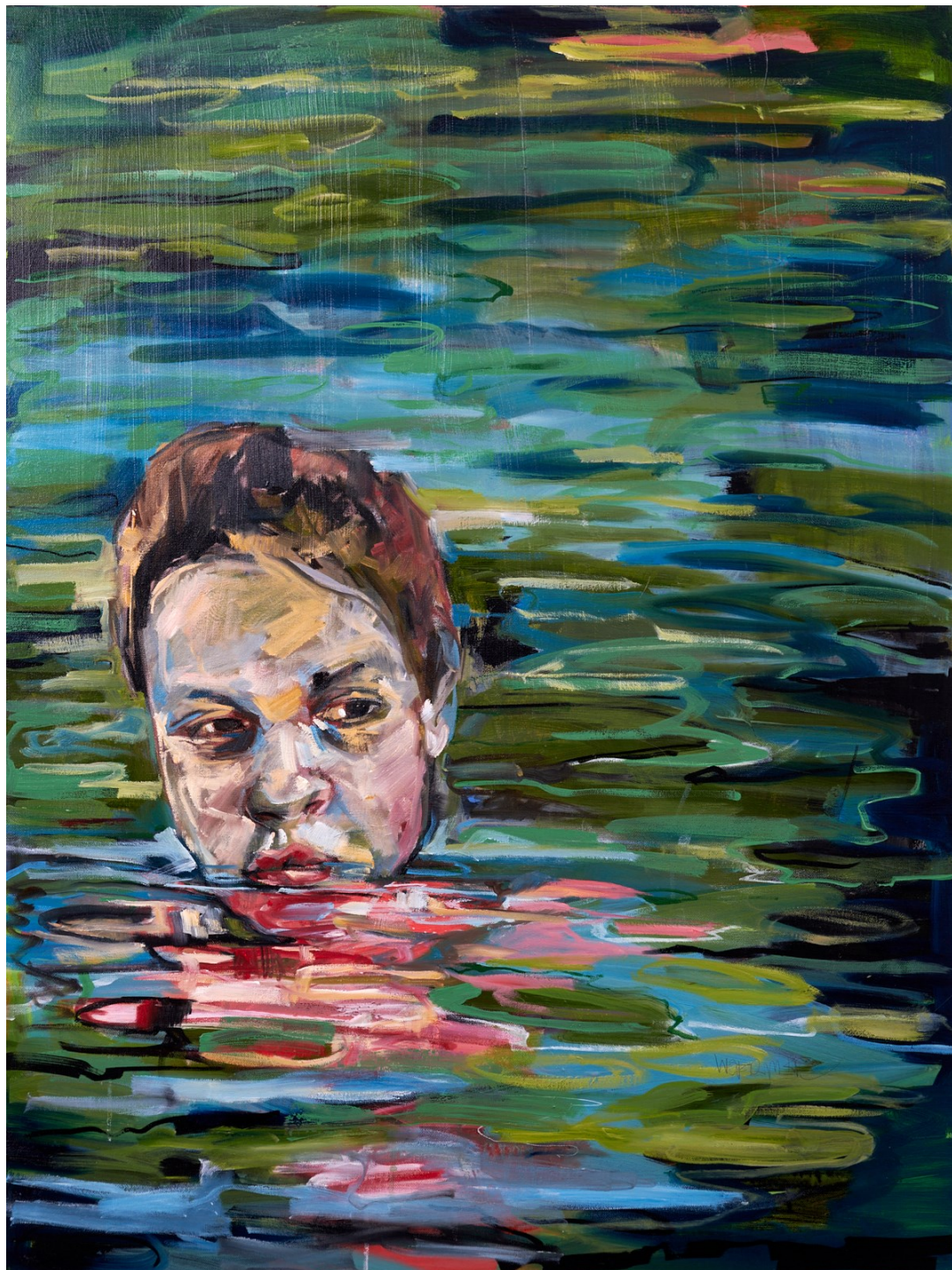


Image: #7, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2024







Previous Image: #8, Acrylic and oil on canvas, (Diptych 48" x 48", 2024

Image: Installation







Installation Image: #13, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 8" x8" (each), 2024

Laura Woermke BFA, CPPA

Education

Bachelors of Fine Arts Honours - University of Windsor, Canada
Diploma in Visual Arts - Fanshawe College, London, Ontario, Canada
Canadian Personal Property Appraisers Group 2021

Solo Exhibitions

2024 *Beyond Belief: Portraits of Uncertainty*, Central Studio, London, Ontario
2016 *Paper Crown*, 711 Central Studios, London, Ontario
2016 *Underneath it all*, St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, St. Thomas, Ontario
2012 *Sick Secrets*, Lambeth Art Gallery, Lambeth, Ontario
2011 *Sick Secrets*, Niagara Artists Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario
2008 *PAINTED AND TAINTED*, Gallery Lambton, Sarnia Ontario
2005 *Documenting a Lie*, Gallery Lambton, Sarnia, Ontario
2004 *Infliction*, Rainbow Cinemas, Market Square, Toronto, Ontario
2004 *Catharsis*, St. Thomas -Elgin Public Art Centre, St. Thomas, Ontario
2002 *Green Art*, One London Place, London, Ontario
2001 *A Personal Journey*, St. Thomas - Elgin Public Art Centre, St. Thomas, Ontario

Juried Group Exhibitions

2023 Art Comp 100 Kellogg, London , ON
2022 *"Is This Real Life"*, Art Gallery Of Sudbury, Sudbury, ON
2018 *Between Lines*, Laura Woermke, Emily Copeland, and Jaclyn White, Jac's House, St. Thomas, ON
2010 *A Continuing Celebration of 40 Years of Fine Art at Fanshawe College*, The Arts Project, London, ON
2010 *The Sketchbook Project*, Home Gallery, Chicago, IL
2010 *The Sketchbook Project*, Soular Art Market, Saint Louis, MO
2010 *The Sketchbook Project*, Art and Shelter Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2010 *The Sketchbook Project*, 303 Grand, Brooklyn, NY
2010 *The Sketchbook Project*, Art House Gallery, Atlanta, GA
2008 *In Good Company*, The Arts Project, London, Ontario.
2006 *In Good Company Nascent Dreams The Next Generation of Influence*, The Arts Project, London, Ontario
2006-2003 *Paint the Huron Shores*, Grand Bend, Ontario.
2006-2003 *Look*, Gallery Lambton, Sarnia, Ontario. 2001 - Applications
1995 *Print Exhibition*, Copps Gallery, London, Ontario.

Two Person Exhibitions

2007 *BODYWORKS*, Gallery Lambton, Sarnia. Ontario

1992 *Bare Breasts and Bowls*, Common Ground Gallery, Windsor, Ontario

Group Exhibitions

2019 *Women's Day Exhibition*, Westland Gallery, London, Ontario.

2015 Museum Gallery, Biograd Na Moru, Croatia

2011 *Punto de Contacto, Norte, un concepto, Point of Contact, Concept of North*, Centro Provincial de Artes Plasticas y disenyo Santiago de Cuba, Curator Maricel Napoli.

2011 *Gallery Show Featuring Laura Woermke and Melanie McDonald*, Thielsen Gallery, London, Ontario.

2010 *Mail Me Something*, Art House, Brooklyn, New York

2009 *Thielsen Gallery at Maggie's*, London, Ontario.

2008 *Summer Group Show Gallery Artists*, Thielsen Gallery, London, Ontario.

2005 *Save the Children Tsunami Relief Fund*, The Arts Project, London, Ontario.

2001-2006 *Visual Fringe*, London, Ontario.

Awards

2014 McGregor Morris Grant - Art in Public Places

2011 McGregor Morris Grant - Art in Public Places

2007 Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Grant

2006 Suncoast Insurance - Purchase Award

2005 Lambton Heritage Museum - Purchase Award

2003 Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance grant

2001 Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance grant

1999 Short Listed, RBC Great Canadian Printmaking Contest

Representation

Benz Gallery, London, Ontario

The Gallery House, Skwirl Contemporary Fine Art, Bayfield, Ontario

Juror

2023 Lambeth Art Association

2022 Port Stanley Artist Guild

2019 Hand-Made, CASA, St. Thomas, ON

2014 Red Show, Windjammer, Port Stanley, ON

2012 Arts County Juried Exhibition

2011 Norfolk County Fair, Senior Art Class

2010 Lambeth Art Gallery, Miniature Show and Sale
2010 Portside Gallery, Miniature Show
2009 Visual Elements , Woodstock Art Gallery
2006 Norfolk County Fair, Art Competition

Reviews

Laura Woermke – Beyond Belief, by Nida Home Doherty , Centered, Oct 26, 2024
Laura Woermke Posing Challenges to the Gallery Space, Centered, July 13, 2018
Challenging the Traditions Nida Home Doherty - September 8, 2016
London Yodeller, Interview with Laura Woermke
The Casserole The Body Issue. Part II. University of Toronto 2013
Secrets behind hidden camera images intrigue, London Free Press, April 16, 2012
Laura Woermke Viewer as Voyeur, Beth Stewart, The Beat Magazine, May, 2012
Grey Borders Reading Series, GBRS presents... Another damn poetry reading @ NAC Featuring Geof Huth, NF
Huth, Angela Szczepaniak + Laura Woermke's Sick Secret, October 1, 2011
A Night We Will Remember, Geof Huth October 2, 2011

Catalogs

Colour Me Happy, St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, 2017
Mail Me Something, Art House, Brooklyn, New York, 2010
Sick Secrets, 2009
Bodyworks, 2007 Gallery Lambton, Sarnia, Ontario.
Anonymous 2007
Catharsis, 2004 St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, St. Thomas, Ontario.

Collections

University of Windsor
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre
Private Collections, Canada, United States
St. Thomas Public Library
North America Railway Hall of Fame

