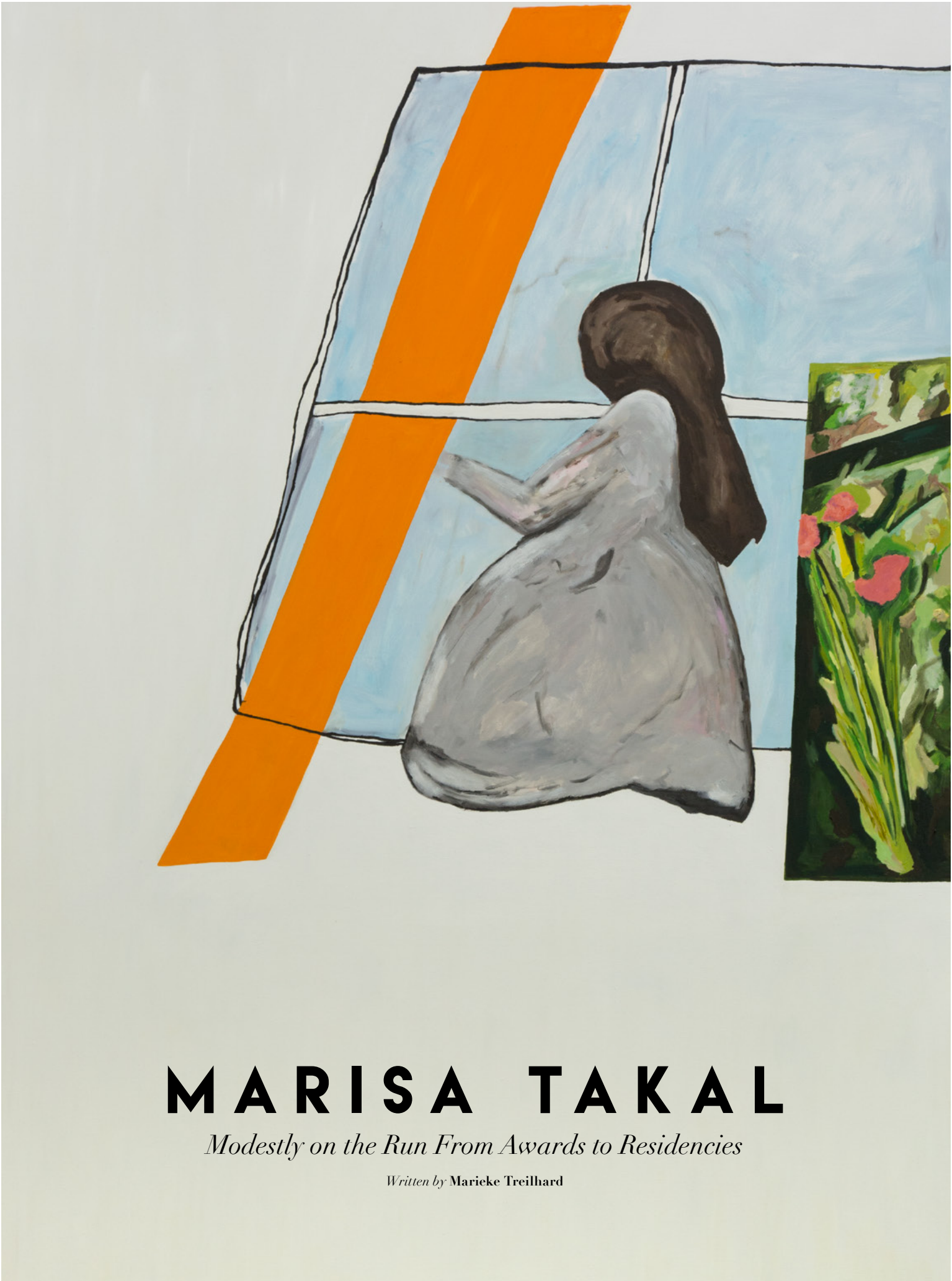




MARISA TAKAL. "I ALWAYS WANTED LOVE, DIDN'T YOU? DON'T YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT? CONTROL?" (2017). OIL AND PAPER ON CANVAS. 65 X 50 INCHES. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NIGHT GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.



MARISA TAKAL

Modestly on the Run From Awards to Residencies

Written by Marieke Treilhard

MARISA TAKAL. "STARING AT THE BIG BAD MAN HE INVITES LOST AND PROFOUND BEAUTY BACK INTO HIS LIFE, BUT IT'S NOT ABOUT HIM IT SHOULD NEVER BE ABOUT HIM" (2017). OIL ON CANVAS. 84 X 60 INCHES. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NIGHT GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.



MARISA TAKAL. "I HAVE SEEN THE PHANTOM COWBOY RIDE HIS TRAIL OF DUST IS IN MY DREAMS" (2017). OIL ON CANVAS. 84 X 60 INCHES. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NIGHT GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.

AT ONLY 26, LOS ANGELES-BASED painter Marisa Takal has already established herself in LA's inordinately saturated art world as someone to watch. She was the recipient of the prestigious Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging

Artist Award and the Stanley Hollander Award in 2016, and she has the rare distinction of having transitioned from gallery janitorial duty to the permanent roster. Far from being a careerist in the repellantly mercenary sense, she is an undeniable talent with an irresistible humility who's the first to admit that she has benefited from some fortuitous turns of luck and cosmic favor. But, when thinking of this young force of nature, at the risk of invoking a well-worn aphorism, I'm struck by the fact that luck can only open up the doors to success, not secure any real tenure or residence in its house.

Takal and I met in December at her then current exhibition *Beyond Oy Too Scared to Ha-Ha* (December 2, 2017 - January 13, 2018), her second solo with one of LA's many Downtown arbiters of art cool, Night Gallery. Open and approachable, Takal's face lights up when we start talking about painting. With a natural ease unaffected by any disingenuous posturing, she takes me through her show one painting at a time, and it's like I'm meeting individuals intimately rather than holding critical court in a gallery. We talk about everything from politics and anxiety induced gestures, to ulcerative colitis, and I'm left feeling like art could really save the world.

Takal's recent body of work attests to her penchant for play in the midst of what are undeniably fraught political and social times, not to mention her willingness to introduce self-effacing humor into the patently serious and oft restrictive terrain of painting. It is impossible to deny the need for escapism in our current political climate, and Takal's highly idiosyncratic works, in all their honest spontaneity, satisfy that longing. She's the first to express some ambivalence at being an "ineffectual" artist in the midst of politically contentious times, a common rhetorical admission typical of the creative's guilt, albeit a very honest one in this case. Her works, however, feel timely as reminders that there is power in alternative vantage points and even reparative social potential in aesthetic practice.

The works feel elated and hopeful, dare I say redemptive, in spite of the times and the misleading exhibition title that suggests an absence of laughter and an existential exhaustion. Takal admits to sublimating much fear and dread into her process, following last November's electoral results. In studio clothes with clay on her hands, she confides, "It felt in the days following the election like the world was just inundated with bad news every day. I put a lot of that anxiety into these paintings, but I also wanted them to be bright and colorful and have joy surging from them as a sort of antithesis to what was going on in reality. I wanted to create these worlds that were their own reality."

Takal is developing a language, a set of contingent meanings that when seen holistically in the context of an entire body of paintings gradually unfold. Often working on several pieces in tandem, recurring symbols and signifiers start to emerge. There are stop signs, cracks, and fissures, inspired by the cracks in her studio skylights; illogical window frames, intersecting roads, random perspective lines and abstracted architectures; hand prints, pink puffy viscera, even words and numbers. The work reveals a profound desire to communicate rather than confound by any visual means available.

She points to a painting with a giant tracing of a hand in the center of the foreground and describes using her own as an intentionally primitive gesture, as a way to work through a roadblock, "For this piece, I was just like 'Fuck it! I'm just going to trace my hand' It gave the painting a personality, it felt powerful, you know like cave painter's or children's drawings. It became a kind of tool when I got stuck. I used to be really hard on myself



MARISA TAKAL. "GRIPPED SURGING A THING, TING TING THE WIND WINDING UP AND OUT CROSSING THE STREET TEE-HEE ME-ME MY MY METROCARD" (2017). OIL ON CANVAS. 75 X 70 INCHES. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NIGHT GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.

and restrictive—"You can't put a cartoon heart there, that's stupid!" I was way more neurotic, but this body of work I just decided to go for it," she says. "At times, these gestures are just ways to take you out of the painting, another connector to make you think of something else, like, 'What does that number or word mean to you?'"

Her works are hewn in a way, drawn from within rather than imposed from without. She finds the content while working and pulls it into existence from beneath the surface. They are labored products of revision and modification, the results of a working mantra I imagine to be along the lines of "create, destroy, revise, remove, repeat"—the deletions as important as the additions. Takal muses, "They just kind of unravel. I'm using impulses and gestures to just go with it, like, 'What does that make me feel?' Sometimes it's a word, and that becomes a theme. That's how it goes. I build and build and sometimes take it all away... I keep gestures and motifs I like, try to make sense of it, and then build around them."

Takal has expertly crafted a chaos that resonates, like an aesthetic orchestration of disorder that feels simultaneously naive and sophisticated. She takes me to a piece created during the peak of a prolonged period of intestinal illness. Pink, fleshy and abject, the body, abstracted in this painting as a mess of labyrinthine entrails gripped by a weirdly androgynous muscular arm, feels significant. By making the invisible manifest as an anatomical roadmap of sorts, it's a literal visualization of being pulled inside out, "I wanted to paint the sickness. The gripping and ripping out, deep in the intestines and down under."

One of the last anecdotes Takal reveals during our interview is by far the best. "You know, it's funny, three years ago I was cleaning the bathrooms here and Davida (Night Gallery's Owner) and I started chatting. She was really open to meeting me and seeing my work. I was only 23. It's so cool that it has all kind of come full circle. I didn't expect any of this." No longer cleaning the gallery's bathrooms, her work now hangs imposingly on its walls.

It's one of the more unlikely identity swaps I've seen in the art world—moving from custodial employee to the marquee. There's nothing better than a real-life origin story steeped in good old fashion self-determinism, likability, and an unusual anecdote. We all need more of these stories, and we all need more creative heroes. We just have to remember that they are all around us, waiting to be discovered.