

Review Myth and mystery in Ekaterina Vrana's paintings at Nicodim Gallery



Ekaterina Vrana's "Crying a Lake," 2015. (Lee Thompson / Nicodim Gallery)

By **Sharon Mizota**

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Ekaterina Vrana's paintings at Nicodim Gallery are striking in their idiosyncrasy. The Romanian artist handles paint like frosting, depicting dream-like scenarios dominated by women and snowmen, birds and fish, and lots of blood-red tears. The world they inhabit is by turns humorous and dark but wonderfully mysterious.

A recurring figure is a woman, seen in profile, with a watering can affixed to her pelvis. She is crying red tears, which fall into the can and emerge from its suggestively phallic spout: Sorrow is transformed into fertility. This idea is reinforced by the flock of small birds that appear behind the woman in "Crying a Lake"; they seem to be generating a body of water with their own red tears. And did I mention that the woman is standing (or riding) on a fish? The image feels mythic in its tangle of symbols.

An interesting counterpoint to the crying woman is the figure of the snowman, a golem, whom Vrana renders in white and black. In her thickly caked surfaces, his simple form — three stacked circles — feels even more clumsy, clay-like and innocent. If the crying woman regenerates the world out of sadness, the snowman feels like a child, a blank slate from which to begin again. In “Omul Negru,” black and white snowmen hold hands, a hopeful gesture in many ways.

Nicodim Gallery, 571 S. Anderson St., Los Angeles. Through July 23. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
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