

SPOLIGHT

## Spotlight artist Alexis Soul-Gray

Championed by art advisor and curator  
Pernilla Holmes



Above Alexis Soul-Gray. Forgetfulness, like a kind snow, should numb and cover them, 2023  
Oil and bleach on linen 170 x 150 cm



Above Alexis Soul-Gray

Interview ALEXIS SOUL-GRAY  
07 February 2024

In Alexis Soul-Gray's richly layered artworks, the imagery that has been bleached, cut out or rubbed away is as meaningful as what remains. The artist collects pictures of family life in the 20th century from knitwear catalogues, vintage storybooks and family manuals, purposefully selecting the most contrived scenes that perpetuate supposed feminine ideals. She will often tear and deface the images, transforming them into paintings, prints and drawings. Cut-out children – removed from the arms of their smiling families – are held instead by the colour-soaked, tear-streaked work of art.

On her own journey of bereavement, Soul-Gray replaces her lost memories with those of others, reworking their narratives. The resulting artworks are simultaneously colour-saturated and bleached away, laden with the emotions and challenges of family life, including love, grief, generational trauma and inherited dysfunction. They are currently on show at The Arts Club in Mayfair, in her solo show *Pink Skipping Rope* (until 12 May 2024), which is also the name of a work she made in the first lockdown of 2020, a period that she says “created a new sense of purpose and urgency” in her practice.

Soul-Gray's work has long caught the eye of the curator, writer and art historian, Pernilla Holmes, who is her champion for The Wick. Holmes is the director of art advisory firm Wedel Art and she knows a thing or two about spotting talent, having curated exhibitions with artists such as Theaster Gates and Shara Hughes well ahead of the curve.

She says: “Alexis’s work is an intoxicating mix of deeply personal experience, psychological and linguistic theory, mass media images and universal themes that I think we can all relate to. Her studio feels like an archive of female identity, stacked with images of women and children she finds in old magazines, knitting catalogues, strangers’ old photo albums and more. She has a keen eye for the uncanny and the kind of visual suggestions we subconsciously internalise. These she weaves together with her own traumas and joys, creating collages that Freud himself would admire for the projection, displacement and suppressed memories they hint at. From all of this comes her extraordinary artworks – painted, stripped back, and repainted over years before she is satisfied. She is a profoundly meaningful and original new voice in contemporary art.”

Adds Soul-Gray: “My practice is an attempt to understand and to reconcile the relationship between the found image, painting and personal loss. I am drawn to the staged format of studio photography, the faked bucolic backgrounds, unnatural lighting, perfect clothes and forced grins. My works are often described as a communication between myself and my mother. Little girls and women of childbearing age are removed through processes such as tearing and cutting, rubbing, scratching and bleaching. I allow them to commune together. I seek comfort in the repeated act of their reunion. I become like a mother hosting a play-date. They act out their memories, hopes and fears in a safe environment that I monitor and close down if (as my mother used to say), ‘it’s all going to end in tears’.”

Describing the act of cutting out the children from their first contexts of family gatherings, she adds: “There is violence in this gesture but also the intention to care and to repair.”

As well as her solo exhibition at The Arts Club and her concurrent group exhibition at Bo Lee and Workman in Somerset, called The Guts And The Glory, she is working towards a solo booth at Milan’s Mi Art Fair in April with Bel Ami, Los Angeles, which is publishing her first monograph in early March. 2024 is set to be a big year for this rare talent.

### About the champion



Pernilla Holmes is a curator, writer, art historian and the director of leading art advisory firm Wedel Art. She has been advising private and corporate clients on building collections, cultural strategy and philanthropy for over 20 years, while curating exhibitions that have included artists such as Theaster Gates, Sam Gilliam, Shara Hughes and Ed Clark.

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