



LAUREL HOLLOMAN

THE INNOCENTS

Menier Gallery
London 2015

For her fifth solo exhibition, and first in London, "The Innocents", the painter Laurel Holloman takes us on an emotional journey and an exploration of how life changes us, as we age.

"The Innocents" is a portrait exhibition (oil on canvas and oil and acrylic on canvas) of women and children with subjects from 18 months to late 80's.

"My goal is to photograph, then paint, early childhood and innocence, i.e, life without the heartbreak to the challenges of adulthood, and then contrast it with more mature portraits.

I have worked with models, all women, and I asked them to share something painful, before the shoot. Something to do with grief. I was curious as to how difficult events change us when we grow older. For example, a 24-year-old's portrait may have an air of discovery or curiosity or even defiance, while a 47-year-old's, after a break-up, may have more heaviness and sadness.

The pieces that portray children (boys and girls) include mostly motion and wonderment. They may be staring at a sunset or taking a bath or looking at a butterfly.

I found that, with my oldest subject who was in her late 80's, there was a sense of awe at the world and it was reflected in her eyes and the energy of her spirit, much like the spirit of a child. It seemed my middle aged subjects displayed the most burden. When my subject in her 80's spoke of her past, there was a sincere feeling of joy and pride. She seemed to be on the other side of mid- life worries that I was seeing in women in their forties.

With many women in the mid-life range, I purposefully shot nudes and partial nudes. I saw that even with the sorrow, there was this interesting openness and frankness about their bodies. I loved the simplicity and naturalness of the nudity combined with the history of mourning. Often, it is easier to show a body you may have lived with for many years but harder to reveal all the history of pain it may have endured.

By starting with children I was able to find the juxtaposition between the candidness of our youth and the stillness of adulthood where life has thrown us curves such as loss or affliction and the memories that go with it. I also noticed a certain self consciousness that started to show in my teenaged subjects. Capturing this, was really exciting and painting it even more so. I feel it is the eyes that reveal so much in these moments.

I have a history in painting large-scale abstracts that capture emotional landscapes. I felt compelled to tell a different kind of story, as I was indeed myself in middle age and raising two daughters that were changing so quickly.

I have been working very hard to produce a different kind of show that incorporates traditional portraiture while humanizing it with the emotion of my work. I played with the balance between some pieces that may have larger brushstrokes and less blended and other pieces that are very delicately blended and feminine, because it was more appropriate to each piece than to maintain a certain style. I find, with the paintings of the children, the brushstrokes are softer and blended, while with some of the adults, more harsh, hog brush style and the definition not as blended. This was still to remind the audience that the focus is the painting, not the initial photograph which inspired it. I often completely changed the background but not the foreground in order to give my subject a feeling of being anywhere, as the location is not of importance and should not detract from the emotion.”

Biography

The artist lives and works in Los Angeles (U.S.A.). After an acclaimed debut with her New York studio collection, TriBeCa in summer 2011, Holloman has had four international solo shows. *Coeur Libre*, exhibited at the Pantheon Town Hall (Paris, April 2012) sold out in its first week. This show was followed by *Free Falling* only three months later at The Ateneo Veneto and ran during the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale to a record breaking attendance and was the first exhibition to contain two 14 ft murals. Her third solo show, *All The World Inside*, took place in Berlin in spring 2013 and included 17 large scale murals in three rooms at the Grand Palazzo Italia. In summer 2013, her painting *Swell* was picked for the group show, *Nell'Acqua Capisco* at the Venice Art Biennale and was chosen for the official catalogue.

Her latest solo exhibition, *The Fifth Element*, was held in Paris (Galerie Joseph) in July 2014 and has met with a public increasingly seduced by the poetic emotion that emerges from the works of Laurel.

This show was followed in October 2014 by an invitation at the International Contemporary Art Biennale in Buenos Aires (Argentina). *The Reach and Map of The World* were chosen for the installation. *The Reach* was awarded by the First prize of the Biennale in the paintings category and Laurel won the Banco Ciudad Award for the Best Work in all categories.

Laurel Holloman earned her Bachelor of Arts at The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill majoring in performance art and visual art. She continued her studies at UCLA and the British American Drama Academy in London alternating between theatre and visual art. Her early focus was on performance art especially Dadaism and sculpture and then progressed to painting.

Innocent

*naive, open, trusting, simple,
natural, frank, candid, unaffected,
childlike, gullible, unpretentious,
unsophisticated, unworldly, credulous,
artless, ingenuous, guileless*





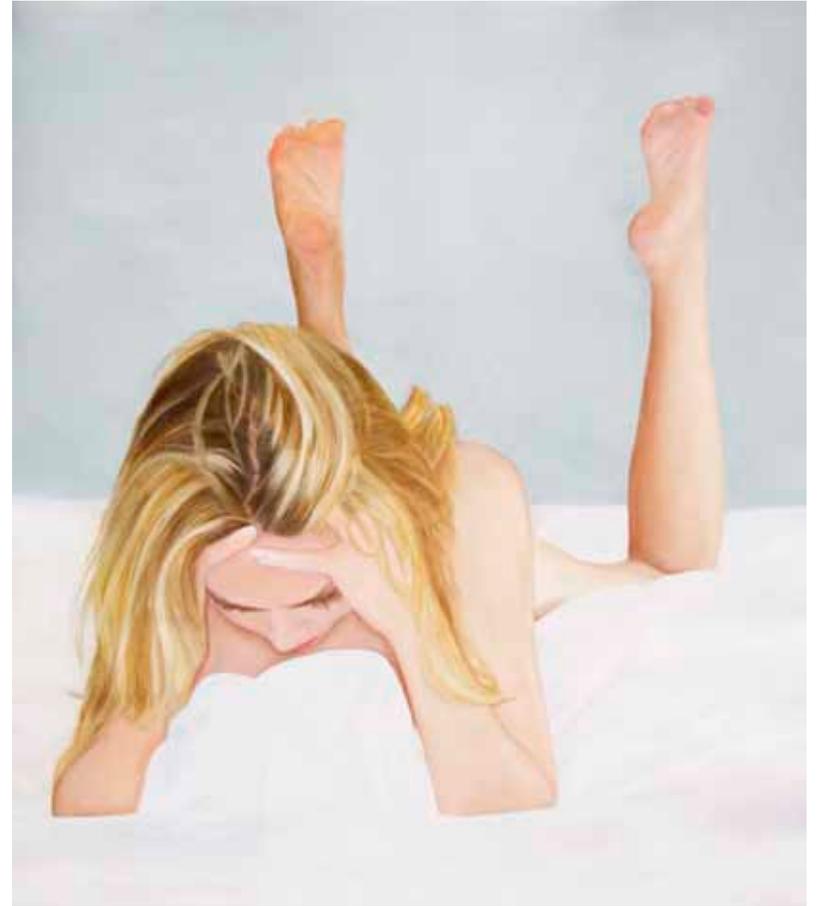
Brother Love

Oil on canvas
20 x 30 in.



10:00 am

Oil on canvas
34 x 34 in.



Wash Over Me

Oil on canvas
34 x 30 in.



April Falls

Oil on canvas
34 x 20 in.

A Simple Plan

Oil on canvas
23 x 35 in.





The Warrior

Oil on canvas
24 x 42 in.



Heavy in Your Arms

Oil on canvas
30 x 47 in.



The Undecided

Oil on canvas
48 x 36 in.



Morning Light

Oil on canvas
31 x 82 in.



Last Night Was A Blur

Oil on canvas
31 x 82 in.



Navi in The Dark

Oil on canvas

20 x 25 in.



The Prodigy

Oil on canvas

34 x 34 in.



Keats in The Dark

Oil on canvas

20 x 25 in.



Invincible

Oil on canvas
36 x 24 in.



Mona Lisa Smile

Oil on canvas

30 x 36 in.



Juliette In Love

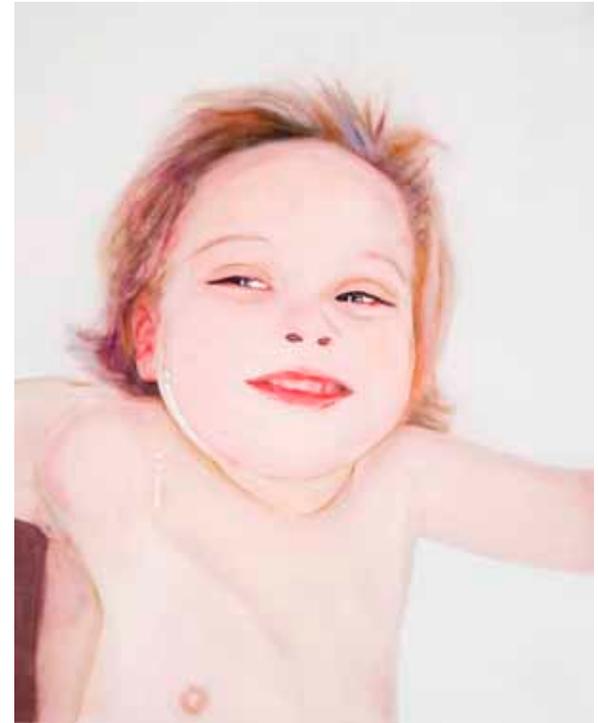
Oil on canvas

20 x 24 in.

Baby In The Bathwater

Oil and acrylic on canvas

25 x 20 in.



Lolita Sleeping

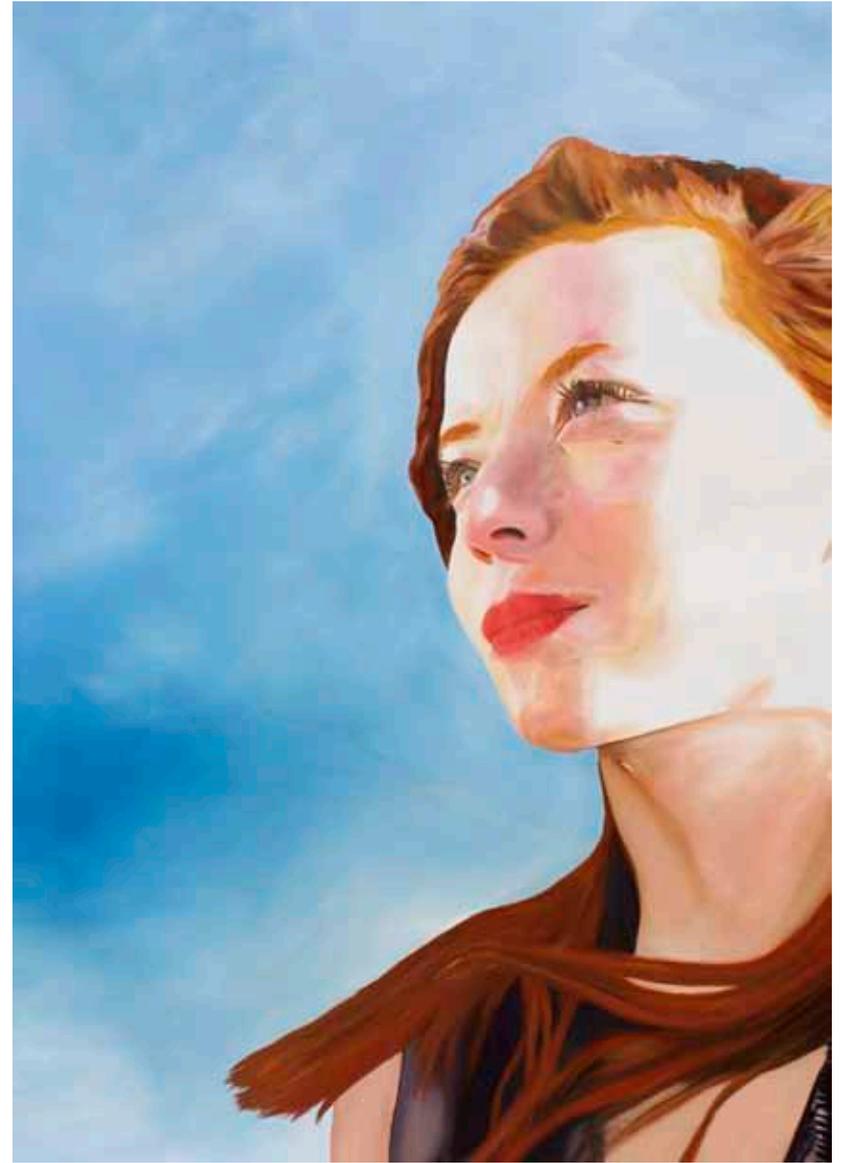
Oil on canvas

24 x 36 in.



About A Boy

Oil on canvas
30 x 30 in.



The Ingenue

Oil and acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 in.



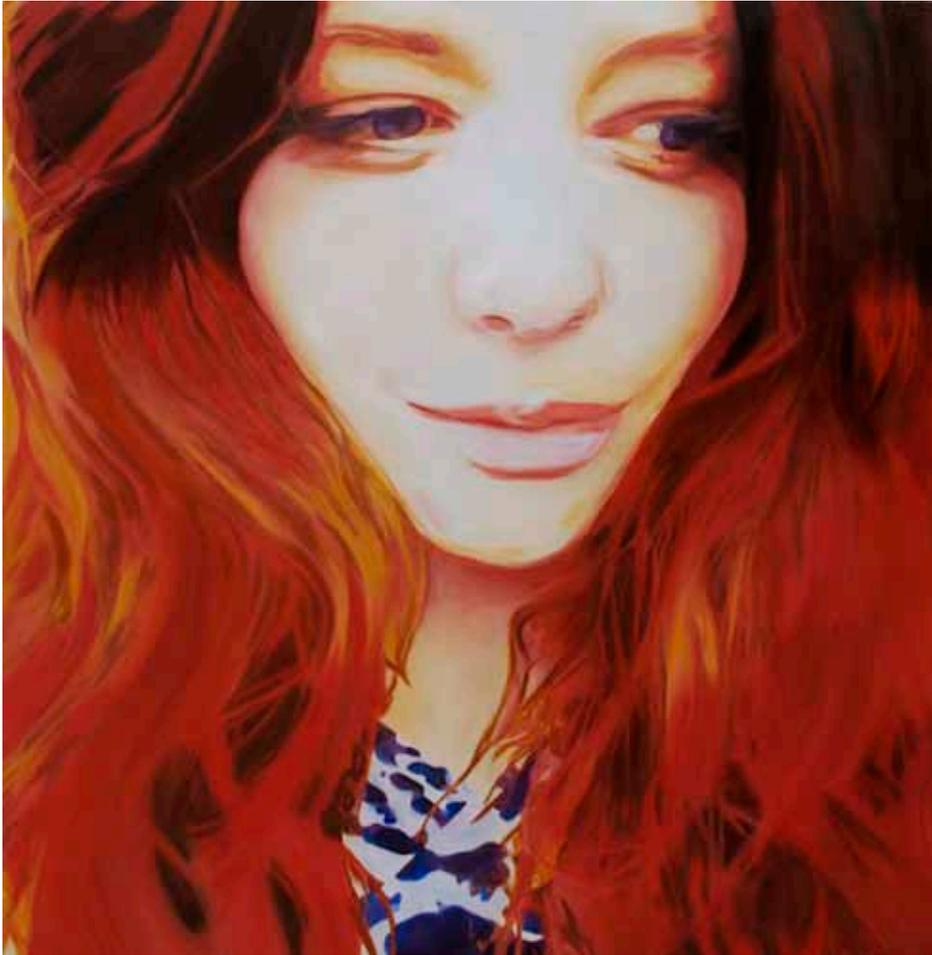
The Sunset

Oil on canvas
24 x 20 in.



Sandra's Eyes

Oil on canvas
34 x 34 in.



The Lioness

Oil and acrylic on canvas
36 x 36 in.

Another Rose in The Garden

Oil on canvas
20 x 24 in.





Why did you choose to do a portrait show when every show has been abstraction?

It was not anything intentional, it was a result of having artist block. After I returned from the Argentina Contemporary Art Biennale, I thought I would walk into the studio and have all these great ideas. I usually have months of studio time with long days followed by months of exhibitions and traveling. I feel guilty if I am in Los Angeles and not going to the studio every day, so I do. When I am traveling it is more about being inspired and taking photos and seeing the world, and doing publicity. I thought when I returned I would elaborate on the styles of "The Reach" and "Map of The World" which won the Biennale. I had planned to do a more in depth series of 60 by 72s. Nothing came out of me. I was stuck, nothing was happening. I was going through canvases and each time I was deeply unsatisfied with the work. This creative drought stayed with me for three months (the longest) I had experienced in a while. It is such a great metaphor for an artist. Meaning... don't believe all the good hype! Meaning don't believe the good or the bad. I think the goal is to reach deep and express what you want without the need for approval. You really have to be willing to be okay with failing, but this time I felt a bit panicky about it. I even canceled a exhibition that I didn't really have time to make work.

So while I was stuck NOT painting each day..... I was going through older photographs of my children (I keep tons of photos in my studio in boxes) and I decided to paint one of my oldest daughter because the expression on her face was so mesmerizing to me. I also started studying Gerhard Richter photo based portrait pieces and was curious how he used his family so much. And honestly, he doesn't care about maintaining a certain style, nor does he see the importance to do so. I mean yes you can recognize his style but he moves freely from photos, to portraits, to abstraction. To be a painter I think you must paint what you feel, not what is expected of you! I had a few people saying why portraits now? Also, to be honest painting is very isolating and lonely and it is nice to spend hours with a face you enjoy. Abstracts are more mechanical like a math proof. After a few months (of very long days) of portraits I felt I might have a show.

Would you say this has made you a better photographer? Because you shoot your show before you start painting?

Yes, I hope so, but I don't desire to be a great photographer. I am a painter first, as I look through the lens I only see what kind of painting it will make. I am usually already painting in my mind as I am shooting. For the Innocents, the only ones I didn't shoot were a few of the children that weren't my kids. I found the children were more natural when photographed by their moms, just as mine are with me. And interestingly enough some of the twenty somethings were based on selfies, so perfect for this generation. I really wanted to paint this because emotionally the shots displayed everything I wanted to be expressed about this age. They are very confident in the poses and without fear. They were without much of a history of rejection or loss. I remember feeling the same way in my twenties, and I found that type of picture of myself in the studio. Also, the young women I chose are extremely intelligent and worldly for only being in their twenties, it really shows in their eyes. There is a look of defiance.

As I worked with women in their late thirties to late forties, I photographed my close friends. I wanted to show the candidness of this age. The shots are very natural, unaware and unconscious. It might seem the opposite of innocence but for me the nudes are extremely innocent and very natural. What I see in them is frankness, a certain honesty. I also did not want anyone to wear make-up. I knew after shooting my good friend, Michelle there were two really good paintings to come from it. She was in her late forties and had just had a break up earlier that week that really blindsided her. In all of the pictures you can see some of the pain and also you can see what a survivor she is, which is why one is titled "The Warrior". She also has a beautiful look and is very natural in front of the camera and trusts me completely which helped a great deal.

Where do you do your shoots?

The majority of this show was photographed at my house, because the light was good. I shot at my friend's homes, for certain pieces. I use only natural light. Always. I never light anyone and shoot during the day. For Sandra I shot her in her rose garden and she was extremely comfortable there. She is in her late eighties and I wanted her to be comfortable and close to her house. She was in her robe, and all of her shots reflected this grace and youthfulness and she had a certain playfulness throughout the shoot. She had a similar energy to the children with an otherworldly element added. I decided to paint a beautiful ultramarine blue around her and lighten it a bit towards her face and hair, instead of the garden. This helped to bring out her eyes and emphasize this otherworldly element. I wanted the piece to have a very modern color.

Do you see some of your abstract style in any of the portraits?

I see it in my backgrounds and in some cases I see it in the hair. I hate doing hair, but love doing eyes and lips. Also, I hate painting feet.... so when in the mood I abstract them! I mostly see it in "The Ingénue" with the sky I painted around Marianna. Marianna speaks many languages and lives a very global life, although only being in her twenties. I know the "world will be her oyster" one day.. I love the confidence in the shot. It is like Amelia Earhart about to take flight. I feel the sky needed to be in front of her and that is a similar sky to "The Velocity of Dreaming" one of the abstracts from the Berlin exhibition. Ironically, the pieces have a similar message while being completely different styles.

Since you have photographed me twice I know you are very clear about what you want, Is it this way when painting?

Sometimes I know and other times I have to go back to change things which is harder for me, but I have gotten better at it. I really wanted to neutralize the backgrounds in order to put more focus on my subjects' emotions and color is everything so these decisions were not always clear and I would change palettes mid-way through. With the children I noticed my style was becoming more delicate and more detailed and it continued this way throughout the end. I was struggling not to become too much like photorealism and I would have to pull away from over detailing some pieces. Like in "Brother Love" I decided to keep the eyes unblended and add more freckles and make the lips more splotchy to keep that painterly feeling. I still wanted the painter in me to be the dominate force. The photograph is really only a guide.

What would you change about the show?

It will hopefully move to other cities and I would like to add more paintings of women in their sixties and seventies.

How do you create your titles?

For this exhibition it felt like each portrait was a character in a play or film. So for me THE INNOCENTS are this group of friends representing certain emotions and characters. So naturally, "Juliette in Love" was perfect for a preteen, or "The Ingénue" for a beautiful Russian actress and "The Warrior" for someone surviving heartbreak. And I think many of the titles speak for themselves and have a slight humor like "Baby in the Bathwater". And coming from working in theatre, of course plays influence me.

Who influences you visually?

Terrance Malik had a big influence on me as does Baz Lurhman, George Miller, and Joe Wright (I loved Atonement and Anna Karenina) as far as filmmakers. I like the photorealism paintings of Alyssa Monks and I liked Matt Doust. I get most of my inspiration from photos I take of landscapes although I am not painting them. Light is everything for me and I feel I am still learning how to capture it with paint. I am never satisfied so I keep searching and studying the painters that use light so well like Gerhard Richter's Reader in which he painted his wife Sabine. The light and the velvet texture are so inspirational. I saw it in The Reina Sofia in Madrid and was completely blown away.

Will you go back to abstract?

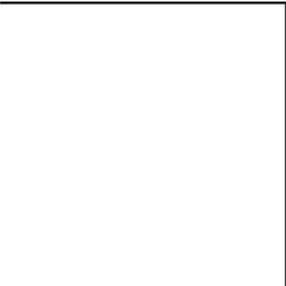
Yes, I imagine I will just try to paint what emotionally moves me and technically challenges me regardless the style or medium. I try not to plan too much; it usually gets in the way.

What was it like to paint people you know really well? And how different than abstracts?

It was really strange. For portraits, it was as if I was talking to them in my head all day. I loved it, I love painting people I adore, it is like having a long intimate conversation with them. And of course painting my children is very emotional because you are recording a moment in time that has such deep meaning for me. I also noticed that I never listened to music when doing portraits. It is completely silent. I wear two pairs of glasses on my head. Reading glasses and I have glasses for distance that I just started to need. It is more technical and slower in its process and I sit more. For abstracts it is loud, there is music and is most definitely more physical, I never sit. My abstracts are almost like a dance. I am exhausted afterwards.

How do you feel about aging? And how does it affect your work?

I feel very comfortable in my skin and feel grounded because my worth is so deeply centered around the right things. I have more patience with myself, but I have a perfectionist side that pushes me very hard to learn. I feel thirsty for deeper experiences, not based on pop culture or ego. I would say I am always searching to find that unique moment of visual irony. I think in mid-life I have become a sponge. I have more adventures and travel more now that I am older and I am grateful that I get to explore more in life as well as work. I felt compelled to do this show because I saw my daughters changing so quickly and I wanted to capture it in paint. There is a moment when you see your child on the verge of becoming a preteen. It is very intense. But more importantly I was changing and I was feeling this intense desire to understand women in midlife and the choices we make that lead us to the older women we will become. This was a very female show, but I am sure I will also paint men when it fits my needs.



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Photo Credit:

Megan Edwards for *Baby in the Bathwater and About a Boy*, her son Keats.

Charleystar.com

Tracy Middendorf for *Brother Love*, her son Oscar.

MENIER GALLERY

51 Southwark Street, London UK SE1 1RU

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www.laurelholloman.net