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MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels)

Folklore Futur

When I first learned the term magical realism (likely while reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez), I felt that I had somehow been given a key to better understanding a world that was neither one thing or another, where time was not linear, causality was subjective, and the magical and the ordinary were one and the same. It gave me licence to cheat on my reality and to live comfortably within a world where unreal elements and the magical could and did play a major part in transforming an otherwise rational or mundane environment into something too strange to believe and yet somehow acceptable or even plausible. Suddenly my world was that space in between imbued with what is called the < marvelous real >.

Future Folklore is a construct of that very principle, of the *marvellous real*. What struck me about the work of Shabnam Zeratti and Emily Jan is how it navigates between varying worlds or realities, and how the work posits a narrative that is anchored in actuality, objective and empirical) and yet framed within the enchanted, the miraculous and the astonishing.



Assemblée générale des actionnaires © Shabnam Zeraati

It is not difficult, for example, to hearken back to Goya's *Sleep of Reason* when contemplating Shabnam Zeratti's work or to be reminded of Orwell's *Animal Farm* especially when 'the creatures looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again', impossible to say which was which. Her hand-drawn bird/mammals and animal-humans, representative of parliament and of the politician, appear not in the least aberrant. Captured in these depictions is our malaise with a flawed political system with her renderings of politicians as an interspecies

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appearing commonplace. Nothing out of the normal here: simply a marriage of the magical and the normal.

Emily Jan for her part disguises colonial conquest and its aftermath in *vanitas* symbology, and references genetic and collective memory through the re-composition of an extinct species. Both works are rendered with an opulence befitting of the sublime and divine - the tarnishing of a once beholden golden age juxtaposed with an allegory of regeneration. Jan operates on multiple planes many of which are in opposition with the other – inharmonious, oxymoronic, and hybridised with her works offering both escape as well as engagement.



After the Hunt, Emily Jan. Photo: © Eric Tschaeppeler

And this is the stuff of legends...with legends being the fine particles that make up folklore along with oral history, fairy tales, proverbs, tall tales and popular beliefs. And while this exhibition could easily have been titled Modern Folklore or Contemporary Folklore it has been assigned a future tense because these two artists, like many others of their generation, are forming now what will one day recognized as the lore of an era, the signature of our past in black & white, and in colour.

Michael Toppings

Artistic & Executive Director