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Louise Bonnet, *Floating Gorgon*, 2021, oil on canvas, 6' x 10' 1/8".
PARIS

Louise Bonnet

GALERIE MAX HETZLER | PARIS

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For “Bathers,” her first solo exhibition in France, Louise Bonnet has unveiled seven new paintings in oil. In lieu of the breast milk that features in some of her recent work, water, rendered across calm surfaces of deep green and pale turquoise, appears in every canvas, transporting Bonnet’s compositions to the realm of classical myth.

Bonnet’s primary reference here is Rubens, especially the pink and blue tones of his robust seventeenth-century nudes, but she’s also a practiced hand at illustration and a longtime fan of E. C. Segar’s *Popeye*. Once a Depression-era boon to spinach farmers, the scrappy sailor famously bulges and contorts in the blink of an eye whenever he downs a can of iron-rich greens. Bonnet’s nudes are similarly out of proportion, but rather than biceps and pectorals, it’s mostly hands and feet that are exaggerated in scale and contour. The artist’s meticulous facture brings all of these bits to life, often presenting bodies truncated or in fragments. Nonetheless, she does not paint reliquaries or headless statues. At the heart of this work is the living body, terribly real in its unwieldiness. “I’m interested in the body being out of control,” Bonnet has said. “You think you’re in control, but you’re actually not, your body is betraying you.” Bulbous and oversize, the figures in *Pisser* (all works 2021) and *Complicated Wind* transform the grand genre of the bathing scene into a grotesque comedy. The protagonist of *Pissing Gorgon* is nearly submerged, posed with her vulva exposed next to an exquisite study of sea anemones and coral.

Headless or hidden by a mop of yellow hair, Bonnet’s characters cannot return our gaze. One notable exception is *Floating Gorgon*, in which four tiny nudes at the bottom left of the canvas look out, bewildered. These stonelike, nearly identical figures must have been caught in the sight line of Bonnet’s titular gorgon. Her gargantuan form floats facedown behind them, hands pressed together as if in supplication, or rather remorse.

— Lillian Davies