

HYPERALLERGIC

A Painter's Delicate, Sexual, and Clinical Visions of Birth

Bridget Mullen draws a line between the act of birth and the act of making art.

Jennifer Remenchik | August 23, 2021



Bridget Mullen, *Birthday Series #13*, 2021, Flashe and spray paint on linen, 12 x 9 in.

LOS ANGELES — The act of birthing a child into the world elicits strong responses: incredulity, fear, joy, disgust. In a world full of differences — personal, social, and political — birth is one of the few truly universal experiences, and despite the awesome profundity of the event, we take it for granted, perhaps because it happens all the time. As you read this sentence, someone, somewhere is birthing a new human being into the world, and it is this act that Bridget Mullen's solo exhibition at Shulamit Nazarian, aptly titled *Birthday*, bases itself on.

There is a tenderness and intimacy to the paintings, all made in 2021, that is not just an emotional projection on their subject matter. They are quite small, like picture portraits, each standing at 12 by nine inches, and are painted more delicately than much of Mullen's other work, which tends to be populated by harsher lines and rougher forms. When seen together, the paintings are obviously anatomical: yonic amalgamations of thigh and buttock-like forms coalesce around smaller circles of vaginas and anuses, seen from both sexual and clinical points of view.



Bridget Mullen: Birthday, installation view, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, July 10 – August 28, 2021.

When taken apart, however, many of the paintings could just as easily be interpreted as a variety of other abstractions. The layered lines of “Birthday Series #22” could be an art deco building; the cartoonish forms of “Birthday Series #13” could be a face. This lack of literalness does nothing to weaken the paintings, instead opening them up to a variety of other interpretations not least of which is the relationship between the act of birth and the act of making art. Says Mullen in an interview with *Maake Magazine*, “I work free-associatively, without plans, to create paintings and sculptures.” In a sense, the style that Mullen paints with is similar to the uncertainty of giving birth to a child: you may have created it but eventually it takes on a life of its own. Part of both the artistic and parenting process is accepting the fact that, ultimately, you have very little control over where that life goes.

All images courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.