

An abstract painting by Megan Rooney, featuring a central figure in a red garment, possibly a dress or robe, rendered in a gestural, expressive style. The figure is surrounded by a complex, layered composition of colors including greens, blues, yellows, and browns, suggesting a natural or organic environment. The overall texture is rich and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth.

Megan Rooney

BONES ROOTS FRUITS

London
6 September—4 October 2021

Thaddaeus Ropac
London Paris Salzburg Seoul

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I imagine myself in flight when I am painting, hovering above the surface and searching for places to land, touching down and lifting off. I do this again and again until the surface starts to collect information... The painting becomes like a capsule, holding the weight of time.

— Megan Rooney

Opening on 6 September at Thaddaeus Ropac London, *BONES ROOTS FRUITS* will be Megan Rooney's first solo exhibition at the gallery, spanning the entirety of the building's two floors. An enigmatic storyteller, Rooney works across a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, installation, performance and language to develop intense narratives in her striking signature style.

Comprising entirely new works, the exhibition will present 10 large-scale paintings and one monumental canvas alongside a selection of works on paper from *Old Baggy Root*, an ongoing series of surreal portraits exploring figuration and the complex range of emotions experienced in moments of observation. The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated essay, *The locust tree in bloom* (2021), by writer Emily LaBarge.

The exhibition follows recent solo museum and institutional shows, including at the Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2020–21); Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2020); SALTS, Basel (2019–20); and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2019), as well as performances at the Serpentine Galleries in 2015 and 2018.

BONES ROOTS FRUITS celebrates Rooney's ability to seamlessly work across differing scales. Whether executed over a period of months on large-scale canvases or swiftly at a table-top for the *Old Baggy Root* series, she creates compelling images that can be explored as forms of memory and transformation. The exhibition's title is taken from the artist's recent experiences, with subjects drawn directly from her own life and surroundings that are deeply invested in the present moment. Through layers of ethereal forms, she creates abstracted narratives without a discernible beginning or end. Punctuating these layers with a contrasting dash of colour or energetic line, her paintings draw the viewer in only to disrupt their gaze with these unexpected elements.

Megan Rooney's fascinating ability to tell stories and create a narrative is felt through the various media of her multidisciplinary approach. Always in flux, recurring characters speak to a narrative that is never fixed, the artist addresses urgent subjects of our time and presents each iteration of her work as part of her Gesamtkunstwerk.

— Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine Galleries

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Rooney's paintings seem as if they could change at any moment, and do; might never be finished, but then are [...] Recognitions that judder and will not stay, undone by the groundlessness of the scene [...] You need not see anything at all, in particular, but you must see, in general – you must look, look again, keep looking. This is Rooney's real business: fighting for the space between representation and abstraction – a collision, a collusion – and what might happen there.
— Emily LaBarge, *The locust tree in bloom*, 2021

The largest work in the exhibition, titled *Stand Up Sky*, is Rooney's first painting on canvas to depart from her universally sized canvases of 200 x 150 cm, a measurement that alludes to the wingspan of the average woman. The 7m-long painting is aligned in both style and scale to her renowned painted murals and combines the unique interiority of her paintings on canvas with the encompassing presence of her murals. Through a complex layering of colour and form, this work embodies the duality of expansion and shrinkage, of captured moments in flux.

Navigating between abstraction and figuration, Rooney's fugitive forms seem to emerge and recede from view, their possible interpretations shifting according to each viewer's physical, personal and cultural vantage points. The artist builds her compositions by working in concentrated bursts, moving across the surface over a prolonged period during which she sands back images, adding and removing marks, repeatedly returning the painting to its beginnings, before building it up again until the final image presents itself.

Old Baggy Root is an ongoing series of portraits executed in acrylic, oil paint, pastel, ink, charcoal and pencil on paper. The exhibition presents 34 new works from the series, each of which captures the essence of an observed moment, news item or individual, or the slippage between human and animal forms. The changing cast of characters includes individuals seen in her local neighbourhood, such as the gentle interaction between a mother and baby, family members and the fragility of aging skin, as well as sphinx-like creatures and statues from the British Museum collection, worn out and semi-present.

Join **Megan Rooney** and **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, Artistic Director, Serpentine Galleries, on **Tuesday 28 September from 6:30pm** for a conversation about the artist's practice and her current exhibition at the gallery.

About the Artist

Megan Rooney lives and works in London. Born in Canada in 1985, she grew up in South Africa, Brazil and Canada. She completed her BA at the University of Toronto, followed by an MA in Fine Arts at Goldsmiths College, London, in 2011.

Her recent solo exhibitions include: Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2020–21); Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2020); SALTS, Basel (2019–20); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2019); Drei, Cologne (2018); Tramway, Glasgow (2017); Cordova, Vienna (2017); Freymond-Guth Fine Arts, Basel (2017); Division Gallery, Toronto (2017); Seventeen, London (2016); and Croy Nielsen, Berlin (2016).

Forthcoming and recent group exhibitions include: Ludwig Forum Aachen (2021); 15th Lyon Biennial (2019); *Paint*, also known as *Blood. Women, Affect, and Desire in Contemporary Painting*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2019); *CHILDHOOD. Another banana day for the dream-fish*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); and *(X) A Fantasy*, David Roberts Art Foundation, London (2017).

Recent performances by Rooney include: *EVERYWHERE BEEN THERE*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2020); *EVERYWHERE BEEN THERE*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2019); *SUN DOWN MOON UP*, Park Nights 2018, Serpentine Galleries, London (2018); *Others got wings for flying*, Tramway, Glasgow (2017); *Poor Memory, Without Poetry Nothing is Possible*, Salon Suisse, Venice Biennale (2017); *f on your tongue*, Project 1049, LUMA Foundation, performed on the Glacier 3000 Tissot Peak Walk, Gstaad, Switzerland (2016); *Last Days. Last Days. Last Days.*, Serpentine Galleries, London (2015); and *Sets of Poetry*, Cell Project Space, London (2015).