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By EMILY MCDERMOTT  
Photography FRANK SUN

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ABOVE: LAURA LANCASTER IN NEW YORK, MARCH 2015. PORTRAIT BY [FRANK SUN](#).

In the midst of a heavy snowstorm, English artist Laura Lancaster and her twin sister landed in New York City and headed straight to East Hampton, where they completed a five-week artist residency, but created separate bodies of work. Painting nonstop for five weeks straight, Lancaster developed a new series, which is now on view in her first New York solo show, "A Stranger's Dream," at Sargent's Daughters. The works, ranging in size from 24 x 30 inches to 102 x 90 inches, focus on abstracted imagery sourced from anonymous home movies, depicted through heavily layered oil paint. Her wide brushstrokes and thick layers—occasionally thick enough to cause dripping—create a sense of movement and confusion. The viewer often knows he or she is looking at a figure, but is unsure who that figure is, where they come from, or why they are in the painting. For Lancaster's work, this idea is key.

"Sometimes I'll be looking for a particular image, say clowns, but a lot of the time there's a randomness," she says. "[The randomness] makes it more interesting for me—to not be too in control and to be responsive to what I'm looking at."

The paintings currently on view mark a significant change for Lancaster, in terms of both scale and subject matter. Previously, she only worked with small canvas sizes and her source images were personal family photos, which eventually evolved into photographs found at flea markets and antique shops. Until now, she had never used film as source material. With this shift in direction, one might be tempted to make comparisons to the work of [Judith Eisler](#), who photographs peculiar moments in film and then paints the resulting images. However, while Lancaster adopted Eisler's similarly new, large-scale approach, Lancaster maintained her use of anonymous subject matter, opposed to Eisler's celebrity abstractions.

Shortly after the opening of "A Stranger's Dream," we spoke with Lancaster via Skype.

NAME: Laura Lancaster

BASED: Newcastle, England

NEW WORK, NEW SCALE: My work has always been interested in the physical presence of paintings and a larger work means it becomes more of a physical experience to make them; the physical act of painting becomes more apparent on the large scale. Also, conceptually, in terms of the painting being a performance or an act of discovery rather than just illustrating something—I've always been a fan of Francis Bacon who is really into the idea of painting not being just illustrational... that's sort of the idea. With the new works based on moving images—they're based on anonymous home movies, like Super 8, actual films I've bought on eBay—[and the canvases made in a] 16 to 9 ratio, the idea is to make these found, small moments into a cinematic experience. So I think that's why there's a slightly different feel to the new work. It's a bit more colorful and a bit more abstracted and dreamy, maybe.

FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TO FILM STILLS: While I've been collecting photographs, I've found films as well, and didn't quite know what to do with them. Then I had enough of them where I thought, "There's bound to be something worth



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painting amongst all of these." Quite often there's mundane subject matter that people have chosen to film, and suddenly something odd will happen—somebody will be in a fancy dress or there will be some strange lighting effect or something will happen where it feels more striking—and it will be interesting to try and paint it on a formal level. Like if something's got really interesting light or colors or dynamism to it, I think, "I'd like to try that in paint." Sometimes I'm wrong though. Sometimes I pick an image and it really doesn't work. *[laughs]* But nobody sees those. I don't always get it right, but it would be boring if I got it right all the time.

**THE ATTRACTION OF ANONYMITY:** The format seems familiar to people, the way painting does, but then it's finding this small gap where it's really unfamiliar, like a universal image that seems familiar. It's an odd feeling to be looking at a picture of you and not know which one is you; it's that feeling that the photograph doesn't actually capture reality the way you intend it to, that slippage between what you're trying to do by taking a photograph and then it doesn't function how you want it to. You take this image to record a moment, but then it never quite does the job. I think it relates to painting a little bit to me—you always want to do the next one to improve it; it's never finished. It's an image that people can relate to quite easily, but then it can also be quite alien as well.

**ART FROM THE START:** My dad paints in a hobby way, but he's quite serious about it even though it's a hobby, so he's always been very encouraging. My twin sister is an artist as well. I think we're all creative in slightly different ways. It's something I've always been obsessed with from quite a young age. I can't really turn it off now...*[laughs]* I remember, when I was maybe 17 or 18, seeing some really big Anselm Kiefer paintings, where they've got all the concrete and stuff stuck to it. The scale, like the physical presence of it, was really impressive to me. That's one thing that really stands out in my memory. I think seeing Rothko paintings at the Tate as well, when I was maybe 16 or 17, felt quite powerful, the presence of them. I look at a lot of other artists and read a lot about them. I just got back from New York and I saw a lot of paintings that will be influencing me somehow without being too conscious about it—like I saw some de Kooning and Philip Guston paintings at The Met. Seeing them in reality, I just want to go home and paint straight away.

**SIBLING RIVALRY (OR LACK THEREOF):** Because we are exactly the same age, I think *[my sister and I]* encourage each other to be a bit braver with our decisions. In East Hampton it was a nice dynamic. We would help each other out, talking about ideas and things like that, because she understands my intentions. She also paints from film stills, but she's got a very different angle on it. She also makes films and photographs, so she's got a very different practice than me. So it's not directly relatable. It's encouraging rather than competitive.

**SIDE GIGS:** I'm also in some bands. I think that definitely influences my painting, but I'm not sure how directly. I listen to music a lot, so quite often I'll be relating music and art and painting together. I play in a band called Silver Fox, which is an all-girl punk band a bit similar to The Raincoats or The Slits in intention, *[but]* slightly different sound to the music. *[laughs]* Then I'm in another band called Big Fail, which is like self-deprecating rock, if that makes sense. It's a bit like Pissed Jeans—noise-rock, really. I play guitar in both bands, but in Silver Fox I sing as well. I think the attitude of the music can help with painting; it can loosen you up.

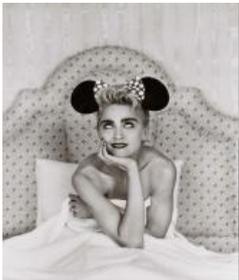
ON THE STERO: I listened to a lot of Leonard Cohen [during the residency], which seems a bit downbeat because my paintings are quite physical. I listen to a lot of rock music, fast-paced rock music, like Unsane. Black Sabbath, I listen to quite a lot in the studio—The Cramps, all kinds of things. It's quite varied. Sometimes it's abstract, sort of drone music, minimal music. Other times it's quite high octane. It depends on the mood.

IN ELAINE DE KOONING'S STUDIO: It's a relatively new residency, where it's invitation only. It's run by Chris Byrne, who is the director of the Dallas Art Fair. Chris has a house in East Hampton with a studio attached, which used to belong to Elaine de Kooning. He basically let [an artist] friend use that studio [a few years ago] and it's developed from there. I think there's been about eight or 10 artists who have worked there. Me and my sister basically arrived into East Hampton the day that it was really, really snowy, and left when it stopped snowing. [laughs] But it was good to be snowed in because there were no distractions. The studio was purpose-built, designed to be a painter's studio. It was perfect.

*"A STRANGER'S DREAM" IS ON VIEW AT [SARGENT'S DAUGHTERS](#) IN NEW YORK THROUGH APRIL 19.*



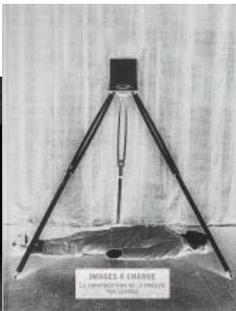
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