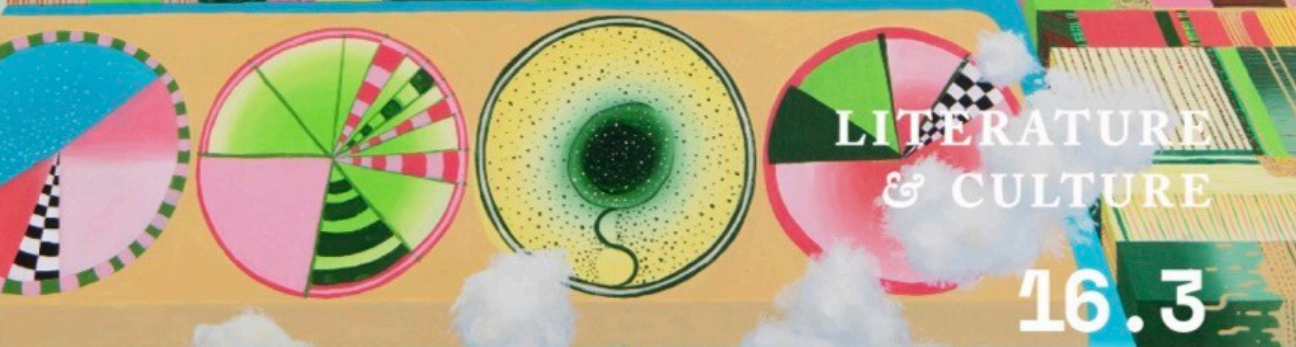


the hopkins review



LITERATURE
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Janice Nowinski***Introduced by Karen Wilkin***

Janice Nowinski's intimate paintings are idiosyncratic, surprising, and mesmerizing. Often not much larger than a snapshot or a sheet of scrap paper, they nonetheless compel our attention from a distance. But they also demand that we approach. When we do, we discover casually indicated reclining and kneeling nudes, images of her stylish grandmother in chic black, a figure in a pink bathing suit, and more. Some images remind us of works by old and modern masters, as if they were fleeting memories of works briefly seen and admired. Others seem so expediently rendered that they threaten to revert to being simply marks on a field of larger marks. All of these small, unignorable works are based, we learn, on other works of art, family photographs, random snapshots, and pictures encountered in the media, translated into a personal, deceptively abrupt shorthand and frequently into moody, suggestive color. Nowinski often returns to motifs, making subtle adjustments each time, probing the implications of earlier solutions and testing possibilities, as the numbers attached to her titles affirm. Like Stuart Davis, who thriftily revisited and recycled what he called "configurations," she clearly believes that a good idea is not exhausted by a single use. I've seen multiple versions of a haunting, silhouetted figure in a pink bathing suit, always fresh, always slightly different in proportion and affect, but always essentially a backlit, frontal figure and hot pink one-piece made luminous by a clear blue ground that suggests both water and limitless space.

When we first encounter them, Nowinski's paintings can seem to have been dashed off with minimal effort. It's as if she challenged herself to use the fewest possible strokes and the least concern for detail to convey the particulars of a pose or a gesture, a discipline echoed by her usually restricting her compositions to figures looming against a schematic background. Her colleague and admirer, Katherine Bradford (a brilliant painter herself) recently observed that Nowinski "makes the rest of us look like we're trying too hard." Yet the more time we spend with these quirky works, the more we discover that despite their apparent effortlessness, seemingly accidental inflections and shifts in the weight and direction of brush marks convincingly suggest specific postures, body types, weight, and poise. We become engaged by the way a few touches of the brush

convey how a prone nude arches slightly upward to confront the viewer. We note a particular way of standing or recognize the pressure of kneeling. The longer we devote to each work, the more acutely we are aware of the seeming speed and economy of Nowinski's depiction. We mentally recapitulate what we think was a hasty, spontaneous process. Yet at the same time, this perception is canceled by our even more intense awareness of nuance, delicacy, and sheer painterly intelligence—the visual inevitability, for example, of the way a folded nude and a relaxed dog, with outstretched paws, fit together on a tiny canvas. That kind of contradiction keeps us engaged and rewards our close attention.



Upside Down Nude (2022) by Janice Nowinski, oil on board, 12 x 9 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Grandma Jean #1 (2021) by Janice Nowinski, oil on panel, 7 x 5 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Grandma Jean #3 (2021) by Janice Nowinski, oil on panel, 5 x 7 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Nude Kneeling on a Pink Pillow (2022) by Janice Nowinski, oil on board, 12 x 9 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Reclining Nude with Red Hair (2022) by Janice Nowinski, oil on canvas, 8 x 10 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Nude with a Dog (2021) by Janice Nowinski, oil on linen board, 9 x 12 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Nude in Front of Mirror (2021) by Janice Nowinski, oil on canvas, 14 x 11 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery



Pink Bathing Suit (2022) by Janice Nowinski, oil on panel, 7 x 5 inches, courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery