

BELLA FOSTER

By Alina Cohen  April 25, 2017 11:59am



Bella Foster: *Venus and Totoro*, 2017, watercolor and gouache on paper, 11 by 9 inches; at Canada.

Los Angeles-based artist Bella Foster creates dreamy, alluring paintings of real and imagined domestic interiors and still life arrangements. A sense of intimacy with the subjects she portrays and an affection for personal relics pervades the twenty new watercolors in her exhibition at [Canada](#) (all 2017), even as the images delve into abstraction and the surreal.

Many of the works have a strange aquatic quality. Foster renders her objects and spaces with rippled edges that make them appear to gently undulate, the technique often complementing incongruous, sealike components of the compositions. In *Deck towards end of first night watch*, waves crest beneath a newspaper on which a cup sits. In *Banana moon*, objects seem to float on a blue surface, which darkens toward the back, like a body of water receding toward the horizon. Water might evoke themes of life and the womb, and, indeed, Foster makes clear her interest in symbolism and womanhood by depicting a copy of *The Great Mother*, a psychology book on female archetypes, in *Red Lolita, Great Mother*.

The paintings, with their fluid lines, bright hues, and juxtapositions of organic patterns and everyday objects, recall works by Matisse—an association that Foster herself encourages in *Pushpin diver*, which features a book with the artist's famous pochoir *Icarus* on the front. Foster plays with art historical tropes throughout her work. With their off-kilter elements, the still lifes reject the simplicity the viewer might associate with the genre. Stuck with pushpins, the orange in *Pushpin diver* and the strawberries in *Stargazer*, for instance, are hardly the welcoming fruits of Cézanne. Nude female figures appear in various forms: as a miniature sculpture on a shelf, as an image on a mug and a poster, as an outline on an ambiguous object. In *Venus and Totoro*, Foster renders the Roman goddess and the Japanese cartoon character side-by-side as what appear to be small-scale figurines, treating the two equally and bringing together religion and pop culture, ancient and contemporary, all within the framework of tchotchkes.

Watching yourself go by entwines many of the threads seen throughout the exhibition. The domestic space shown in this work has turquoise walls and a seafoam green ceiling that give the room a submerged, oceanic quality. A lamp on the floor with a red-and-white body resembles a buoy, and indeed appears more tethered in place than the other objects, which seem adrift. On the walls hang various drawings—some look like color studies, one is a view of a nude woman, another displays text, another features a cascading blue form. These works within the work might represent Foster's primary concerns: color, the female form, language, water's myriad associations. Suspended from the ceiling of the painted room is a surreal mobile whose three dangling components depict eyes—another motif of Foster's, this one perhaps conveying the importance of observation to her practice.

Hovering eyes also appear in *Heads or tails*, where, located in a whitish field in the composition's upper half, they stare down at a mug emblazoned with the Great Seal of the United States. Here, as in *America the Beautiful*, which portrays a book of the same name, Foster pokes fun at her country's grandiose view of itself. Throughout her work, she explores concerns ranging from the aesthetic to the existential to the political, all by paying close attention to the type of everyday items that can be found on a simple bookshelf or kitchen table.

Read More About:

[alina-cohen](#) | [bella-foster](#) | [CANADA](#)