

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY TO REPRESENT ESTHER PEARL WATSON

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to announce its representation of **Esther Pearl Watson** (b.1973), known for her narrative paintings that portray suburban settings with skies lit up by spaceships and glittering stars. Watson's work was featured at AEG for the first time during the 2018-19 group exhibition *April 14, 1561*, which highlighted UFO-inspired art. A solo show, *Guardian of Eden*, followed in 2022 and another is planned for the gallery in 2024.

Watson was born in Germany but grew up in small towns outside of Dallas, where her father worked odd jobs and spent much of his time building flying saucers from scrap metal and auto parts. He hoped one day to achieve the American Dream by selling his satellite designs to NASA. Informed by folk art, Watson's memory paintings are based on her past and present experiences, which she has continually logged in personal journals since she was thirteen.

Employing a straightforward, representational style akin to folk artists like Mary Anna Robertson Moses (Grandma Moses) and Clara McDonald Williamson, Watson paints flat, stylized forms on panel and canvas using a vibrant palette of acrylic paints, glitter, and silver foil. Through the luminosity in her work, she embraces uncomfortable moments in her life that may have been difficult to cope with at the time.

"I really search out moments of awkward humor," Watson told *Studio International* in a 2019 interview. "It is in my comics as well. That's just been my whole life – painfully awkward moments that I naively navigate through. When I was still living at home, I came across *Raw Vision* magazine; this is how I was first introduced to folk art. There was a similar vision and passion that the artists shared with my father's saucer-building. Then, in college, I found Douglas Curran's book *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space*. I realized there were others out there building saucers like my dad. Folk art felt like the language I was raised in."

After earning a BFA from ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena in 1995, Watson began her creative career in Brooklyn as an illustrator—writing and illustrating children's books and editing and illustrating poetry collections. She made her biggest impact with her self-published comics and zines and her award-winning graphic novel, *Unlovable*. Based on a teenage girl's diary, which Watson found in a gas station bathroom, the stories in *Unlovable* were first serialized in *Bust* magazine and then published in a three-volume set by Fantagraphics, the celebrated American publisher of comics and graphic novels.

After moving back to California in the fall of 2003, she began making more personal work, and when she started showing in 2005, painting had become her primary medium. Watson continued to exhibit her colorful storytelling art in solo and group shows while earning an MFA

father's flying saucers hovering over oil rigs, trailers, and broken-down cars on rural Texan roads—with descriptive titles handwritten directly on the surface—began receiving international attention and were featured in solo and group exhibitions in Sweden, Italy, Norway, France, and England.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Watson shifted her focus to the hardships that she and her family and neighbors had to deal with. Based on personal experiences of her pandemic life in Los Angeles, news articles about the devastating wildfires, and the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd, Watson's critically acclaimed exhibition *Safer at Home: Pandemic Paintings*, shown at Vielmetter Projects LA in 2021 and Western Michigan University's Richmond Center for Visual Arts in 2022, brought even broader interest to her homespun diaristic work.

Since the end of the pandemic, Watson has returned to painting communal scenes with starry night skies, cascading comets and shiny UFOs, bringing a renewed sense of joy and optimism to a life filled with memories that provide endless material for her lively art.

Esther Pearl Watson is also represented by Vielmetter Los Angeles, Maureen Paley (London) and Webb Gallery (Waxahachie, TX).