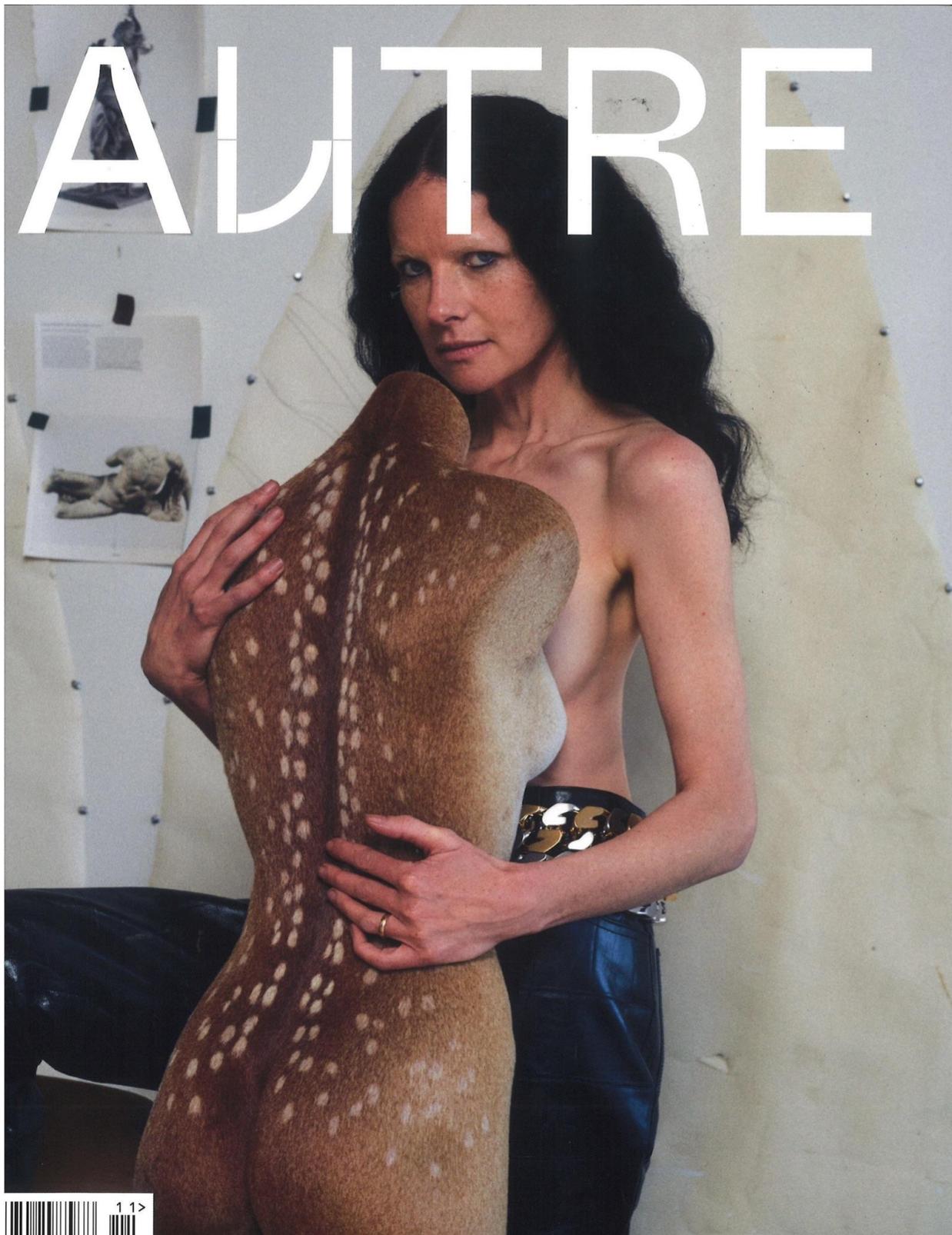


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**IMAGE: Fat Car, 2002**  
Mixed media  
130 X 265 X 480 cm  
Courtesy of the artist, Erwin Wurm Studio  
photograph by Arthur Evans

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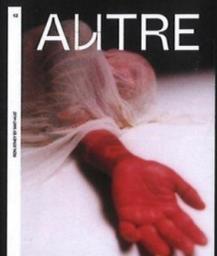
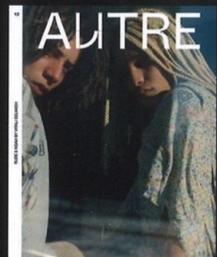
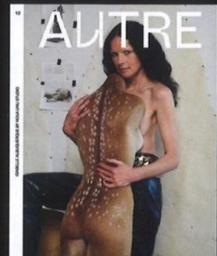
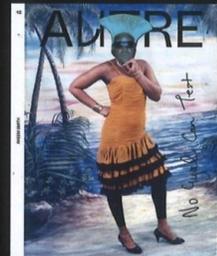
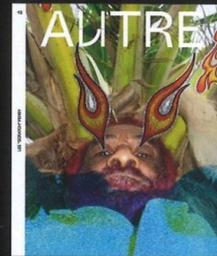
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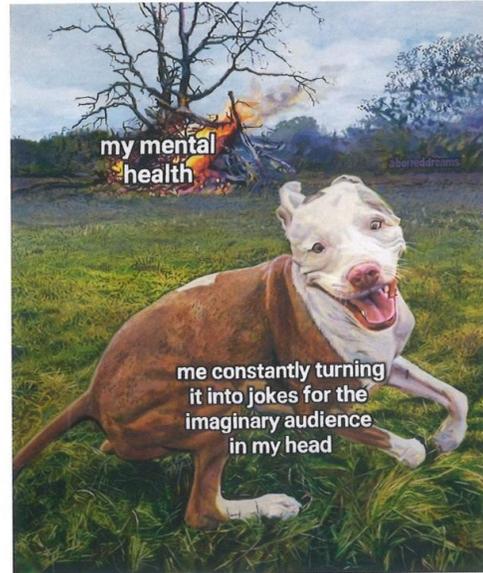
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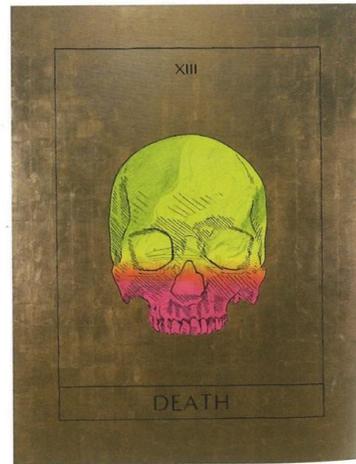
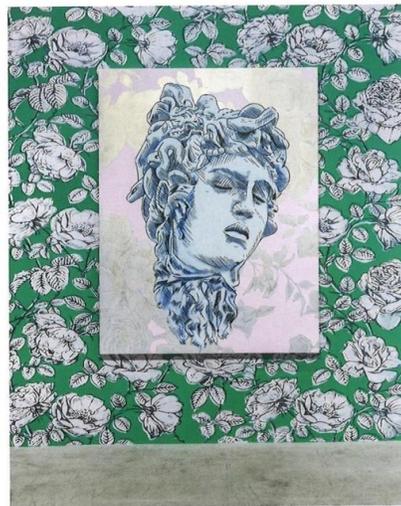
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Covers, from top: 01 Lee "Scratch" Perry; Negril, Jamaica 02 Akeem Smith; Collages by Nick Sethi 03 Isabelle Albuquerque photographed by Noua Unu Studio in Los Angeles, wearing Givenchy SS21 04 Rude & Noah by Vital Gelwich in collaboration with AY Rebirth 05 Ron Athey photographed by Mat+Kat





In 2021, memes have taken on not only a new symbolic meaning, but also power. They are the hieroglyphs of the post-internet age. In artist Christine Wang's paintings, memes become tangible artifacts of this digital epoch. They pierce through our brief, flashing feelings of ennui to an unsettling relatability. For Mieke Marple, contemporary updates to Tarot and ancient mythology hold a similar divining command of our zeitgeist's interminable present.



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THIS PAGE, from top: (1) Christine Wang, *Volcano*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas (48 x 48 in / 121.9 x 121.9 cm). Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery. (2) Christine Wang, *Dog*, 2021. Oil on linen (72 x 60 in / 182.9 x 152.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery. (3) Mieke Marple, Installation view *Bad Feminist (Silver Floral Medusa)*, 2019. Acrylic and archival ink on canvas (70 x 54 x 2 in / 177.8 x 137.16 x 5.08 cm). Courtesy the artist and [Ever Gold Projects]. (4) Mieke Marple, Installation view *Death (Rome on Fire)*, 2020. 24K gold and acrylic on canvas (70 x 54 x 2 in / 177.8 x 137.16 x 5.08 cm). Courtesy the artist and Ever Gold [Projects]

# MIEKE MARPLE & CHRISTINE WANG IN CONVERSATION

**MIEKE MARPLE** So, we met at a party I threw in 2010.

**CHRISTINE WANG** I remember there were colored lights and I was new to LA.

**MARPLE** Was that one of the first LA parties you came to?

**WANG** I remember thinking, these people are so cool—I better go home.

**MARPLE** But we also met when I did a studio visit with Davida [Nemeroff, founder of Night Gallery] when you were at UCLA grad school. This was back when Night Gallery was at its original space in the strip mall in Lincoln Heights. It was all black and open 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM. Christine had a show in the project space. I can remember just being really blown away by your paintings. Your ambition was so obvious from the beginning.

**WANG** I had this painting that said, "Would you rather I paint A, B, C, or D," and it had different painting styles—it was a diptych. So, you took it to NADA that year.

**MARPLE** I like how serious you take absurdity. I guess it's still a huge part of what you do in a way. And I think this kind of biting tone that leaves no one off the hook, including yourself—it's really something I love about your work. So, why memes?

**WANG** Memes because I ran out of ideas and I just copy ideas from other people on the internet. What about you? Why Tarot?

**MARPLE** There's a few reasons—Tarot was the first body of work that I showed. I had also joined a 12-step group and I was really relying heavily on spirituality.

**WANG** I remember we did that Tarot show together. We were both new to the Bay Area, so we were like, what are Bay Area people going to like? Tattoos and Tarot! And we couldn't do tattoos in the gallery, because I don't know how to tattoo, but we could make paintings. So, that's my recollection—that we made a Tarot show just to cater to the Bay Area.

**MARPLE** I feel like that was your reason. [laughs] I was genuinely looking for guidance. I honestly felt like I was trying to look for answers. I actually didn't know anything about Tarot before, so I went from not knowing anything about Tarot to making my own full Tarot deck. That is kind of how I tend to do everything. And then, I've been evolving that deck, in a way, ever since. And I imagine that I will always come back to Tarot whenever I feel not sure of what to do next. But the paintings that you did, I thought they were amazing. I hope you revisit Tarot. The one that says,

"You will get old and die." I just felt like they're the most brutal and most honest Tarot readings you could ever get.

**WANG** I just wanted to make them crystal clear. First of all, I was too lazy to make the whole deck. You made the whole deck, but I just made the Major Arcana into a little mini deck and I didn't want to mess with interpretation. So, I made it crystal clear, so whenever you pull a card, it just says exactly what you have to do. Like the Hanged Man says, "Chillaxin." The Star says, "Go to the spa."

**MARPLE** What about satire in art? What do you think is the power of humor in art? Maybe specifically in painting.

**WANG** Before I went to grad school, I would make paintings and they would have painting jokes in them, but nobody got the jokes.

**MARPLE** What's an example of a painting joke?

**WANG** I don't know, it was just putting a light bulb where the sun is supposed to be in a landscape. Or I put a hinge where the horizon was. I would consider them painting jokes, but nobody got them except painters. No one was LOLing, you know, no LOLs whatsoever. I want to make jokes about more important stuff now. I think a lot about survival humor—we're in a time where so many people are dying either because of wealth inequality, poverty, coronavirus you know, or just being the wrong race. You just die. So I hope that a lot of my humor is survival humor.

**MARPLE** Can I ask a question that's sort of related? How do you feel about making paintings that are basically luxury commodities in this moment?

**WANG** I feel fine. They pay me and I buy food with the money and I eat the food. And I am fine with that. You know what I mean?

**MARPLE** I guess I asked because you were involved with the prison abolitionist group Critical Resistance for so long. For me, participating in the art world as a luxury commodity market—I can't imagine that you get this same kind of satisfaction, but maybe you do. How have you reconciled that?

**WANG** You and I have both helped organize art auctions for Critical Resistance. Critical Resistance's mission is to abolish the prison-industrial complex. I helped with my first art auction for Critical Resistance in 2015. I realized that it was only at the point of sale when the painting became a commodity, and then became money, which became useful for the organization. The painting had to be sold in order for it to be useful. Before that moment, in my head because of school or whatever,

it was: here's the art world, here's politics. And the two shall never meet, or the two are antithetical, or undermining each other. I went to school with institutional critique people teaching me. For a long time, there was this anti-painting stance in the art world, because paintings were seen as commodities, but now, everything's a commodity.

**MARPLE** I've been thinking a lot about supremacy in all our structures, like the business models of the art world and how they promote that. How we are not valuing all human life the same way. And that's becoming clear in a really painful way with COVID. Especially with the rates at which BIPOC and Latinx people are dying compared to white and non-BIPOC people. It's a pretty depressing reality. It shows how we don't value life equally. But it's inspired me to bring a lot of that awareness into the art world and to see how the art world perpetuates some of that thinking.

**WANG** This goes back to Foucault's idea of biopower, right? He has this maxim, "To make live and to let die." So, it's this idea that some people's lives are longer than others. Like, people who are imprisoned have shorter lives. It's so clear. And Coronavirus made it even more clear, right? Someone on Twitter, recently said there's two classes: it's not upper class, middle class, and working class. It's the class of people who can work from home, and then the class of people who have to go out of their houses to work.

**MARPLE** Yeah. Risk their lives to work.

**WANG** Literally risking their lives to stock a grocery shelf or run the MTA, or do any of those essential worker jobs.

**MARPLE** Yeah, and we haven't been forced to look at this before.

**WANG** I mean, at least in the prison industrial complex abolitionist world, we see it all the time—we see whose lives are important and whose lives aren't. I think Coronavirus just exacerbates it. I don't think it's news to anyone in the prison industrial complex abolitionist movement that anti-Black racism kills. But when millions of white people saw George Floyd getting murdered, it was news.

**MARPLE** Yeah. And that's what I think has made some of these terms, like "defund the police," which I think before COVID, and before the uprisings, was seen as really radical. Now they're becoming mainstream because they don't seem crazy. They seem logical. It's a profound time right now.

end