



**Frieda
Toranzo
Jaeger**

16 Mar – 26 May 2024

**A future
in the light
of darkness**

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Frieda Toranzo Jaeger is a Mexico city-based artist. Her work explores hybridity, automation and technology through her intricately embroidered paintings of driverless cars, engines and spacecraft to consider alternative, post-capitalist and decolonised futures. Here, the artist discusses her exhibition *A future in the light of darkness* with curator Jessie Robertson.

JR: Can you tell me about the exhibition title *A future in the light of darkness*?

FTJ: The future is a recurring topic in my work. I think our ideas of the future are very constrained by capitalism, because capitalism colonises our ideas, our imagination,

and therefore is colonising our ideas of the future. And it's becoming increasingly narrow, so every time we think about the future, it's either an apocalyptic one, or a very colonial kind of sci-fi space idea which is often very sterile.

Through reviewing history, I want to try to revive [images of] utopia, and bring them to the present to imagine a future in which everything is possible. But I think the future becomes very dark when it is preset or pre given to us by a capitalistic imagination. And I think that's the darkest idea of a future, because apocalyptic realities are becoming more and more present. This is what I want to change, because I love the future, and I think space and sci-fi could be a very liberating place. But the Western idea of space and sci-fi is just really homogenised. It's so weird. And it's so white! I just think if we're gonna live in space for many years, I want some colour!

JR: Your work often references well-known scenes and imagery from art history, could you explain why you have selected some of these references?

FTJ: I would say that revisiting history is one of the more central practices in my work. If you want decolonisation to come to you in any form, you have to revisit history. And because I paint, I think revisiting the history of painting is very important. I like the painting from the 1400s and 1500s which was a period when altar paintings became very popularised. I like this period because people were still figuring out how to paint, people were experimenting, it was trial and error and I love the idea of seeing this process of figuring it out.

What I like about painting is that it's a very slow medium.

The potential of painting is that it can change your ideology. So for example, in the work *For new futures, we need new beginnings*, I do that, I go back to revisit the foundational myth of Adam and Eve so you can be like, I didn't chose this and I don't relate to it. And therefore revisit this history with another lens so that I can give myself another meaning in the future. That's why I revisit history, especially European history, because from there comes all the ideas of colonisation, so I have to resist those ideas.

In the works where I re-visit Diego Rivera, this is very different. I chose Rivera, because for me, he is a repressing figure. I think this is the Mexican idea of an artist, and because I'm a Mexican, I will always have to deal with him, because this is the history the West remembers of us constantly. The title of [the new work that I have made for this show] is *Drop Out Tradition*. I really want to drop out of the tradition of this macho painter - I want to detach myself from this. When [Rivera] started to do all these murals, he also started to construct an idea of the native Mexican as a person of humbleness and very much like a working person. And he had no agency to do so. He gave himself the agency to represent indigeneity in Mexico, and I think that's super problematic. So that's why I have these hands going into the car, but at the same time, it looks like they will be dropping these flowers inside, just to drop this culture and revisit him in another light. Nobody wants to do that in Mexico, because he is such a set in stone, kind of iconic person. And I think that's wrong, history should move, history is a dialectical process. So that's why I revisit history, and I think that it is very important to do so.

JR: Your work subverts and re-shapes familiar imagery and symbolism to challenge and critique from within. Could you speak a little bit more about this idea and why it is so significant in your approach to painting?

FTJ: I think it's an exercise of criticality, which right now, is really in danger. I think we, as humans, because we are rational, and we are aware of our existence, we should never stop exercising criticality. This is very important. Regardless of what you do, even if you think it's right or not, you can exercise critical thinking around it. So as I'm a painter, I should be critical towards painting as a medium.

You know, and I understand for example, painting's relationship towards commodity, painting's relationship towards preciousness and market values, and I criticise all of that. I criticise the parts of painting which I think are killing painting, but I kind of adore the other parts of painting, which are not doing that now. So I try to be always evolving and updating these ideas around painting - what is still good, what is still bad, and how I can move myself within it. I'm really in it, right? Like this is what I do every day, so I think it would be foolish if I did not criticise it.

JR: A number of your recent works, including two of the new pieces that you have made for this exhibition, explore the heart motif. Can you tell me more about this?

FTJ: I like the symbol of the heart because it talks about our desires, not our needs - it talks about desire in a capitalistic sense. The desire of the 'Like' button in

Instagram or Facebook, do you heart or do you not heart/like, or why didn't you give me a heart? This is a machine of endless desire. And it becomes really hard to stop being part of this endless desire of this endless heart giving.

I am also really curious about how this symbol has functioned throughout history. I think the symbol of the heart has moved in so many directions and always has to do with our desires. In the medieval ages it had to do more with fertility. And now you know, [for the two sculptural heart shaped objects that I have made for this show] I opened the heart, and I put it on the floor. And it's kind of like a disaster. Because now, desire is a disaster. The heart is open and it is caught in the middle, because desire is always there and you're always engaging with it, myself included.





JR: Your work often incorporates embroidery, what is the significance of integrating this practice into your paintings?

FTJ: I think one of the results of being critical of painting is that I wanted to destroy the preciousness that the Western canon has given to painting. In order to do so, I chose to integrate another genealogy. In this case, the genealogy of embroidery has a very different status, right? I mean this is slowly changing, but embroidery was seen as craft, or something less than painting, So I'm trying to bring these two together to collide. And I think it's important to destabilise this preciousness so that's why I started to incorporate embroidery into painting. It is also a tradition that has been passed from women to women in my family, and I think it's a very important tradition to keep.

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Frieda Toranzo Jaeger would like to thank her Studio Manager Rosa Hernández, Alejandra Paniagua Torres, Amaranta Aviles Santamaria, Miriam Quijano Paz, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, Arcadia Missa, London, Bortolami, New York.

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Modern Art Oxford is supported by



Supported using public funding by
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Frieda Toranzo Jaeger, *If the future is full of death, the past is the only alternative source of inspiration to the traditions and memories of a zombie world*, 2023. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin and Bortolami, New York.