



A Room of One's Own: Women Painting Women

By Catt Dunlop



Ruth Bernhard, *Golden Light*, 1960, Chromogenic print, 10" x 7.85"

Many of the works in the show offer haunting portraits of women consumed by thought in a solitary world. This sentiment is perhaps best conveyed by Katie O'Hagan's self-portrait *Dirty Laundry*. The work depicts a woman with dark, tousled hair standing in the middle of a barren street. Head turned in profile, she clutches a pile of crumpled clothes as if they are her identity—frozen in the decision to drop the heap or soldier on. Her second work, *Almost Home* features a woman in pearls and a black dress walking barefoot with her high heels in hand. She looks behind her with an uneasy distrust of her surroundings. Most women will immediately relate to her anxious expression and late-night fear; not wanting to attract the wrong kind of attention, she is ready to run if necessary.



Katie O'Hagan, *Dirty Laundry*, Oil on canvas, 48" x 38"

Other works in the show, such as Ellen Cooper's *Vortex*, explore similar scenarios that place women in the position of being watched. Cooper's low-angle composition makes it difficult to know exactly where the viewer is positioned in relation to the subject, it also casts awareness on the viewer as a voyeur. Ruth Bernhard's chromogenic print *Golden Light* softens this dynamic by capturing a shy moment from a classical female nude (a subject historically dominated by male artists). With a slight knowing smile, the woman stretches into a contrapposto position and shields her eyes with her arms, effortlessly emitting natural warmth. The piece, like so many in the exhibition, is not just a woman artist's depiction of the female subject, but also a female subject expressing herself as she wants to be depicted.

Women Painting Women suggests that a room of one's own is not limited to the walls of a studio or gallery; the canvas, too, is a space to dwell and let creativity flow. Woolf maintained that great women artists would emerge if society supported them. This exhibition is both a confirmation and commencement of that belief.

A Room of One's Own: Women Painting Women is on view at Haynes Galleries through October 5.



Ellen Cooper, *Vortex*, Oil on linen, 48" x 32"