



Bewitching Women:

A Profile on Artist, Curator (and Working Mum)

Olivia Mansfield

By Zoë Goetzmann

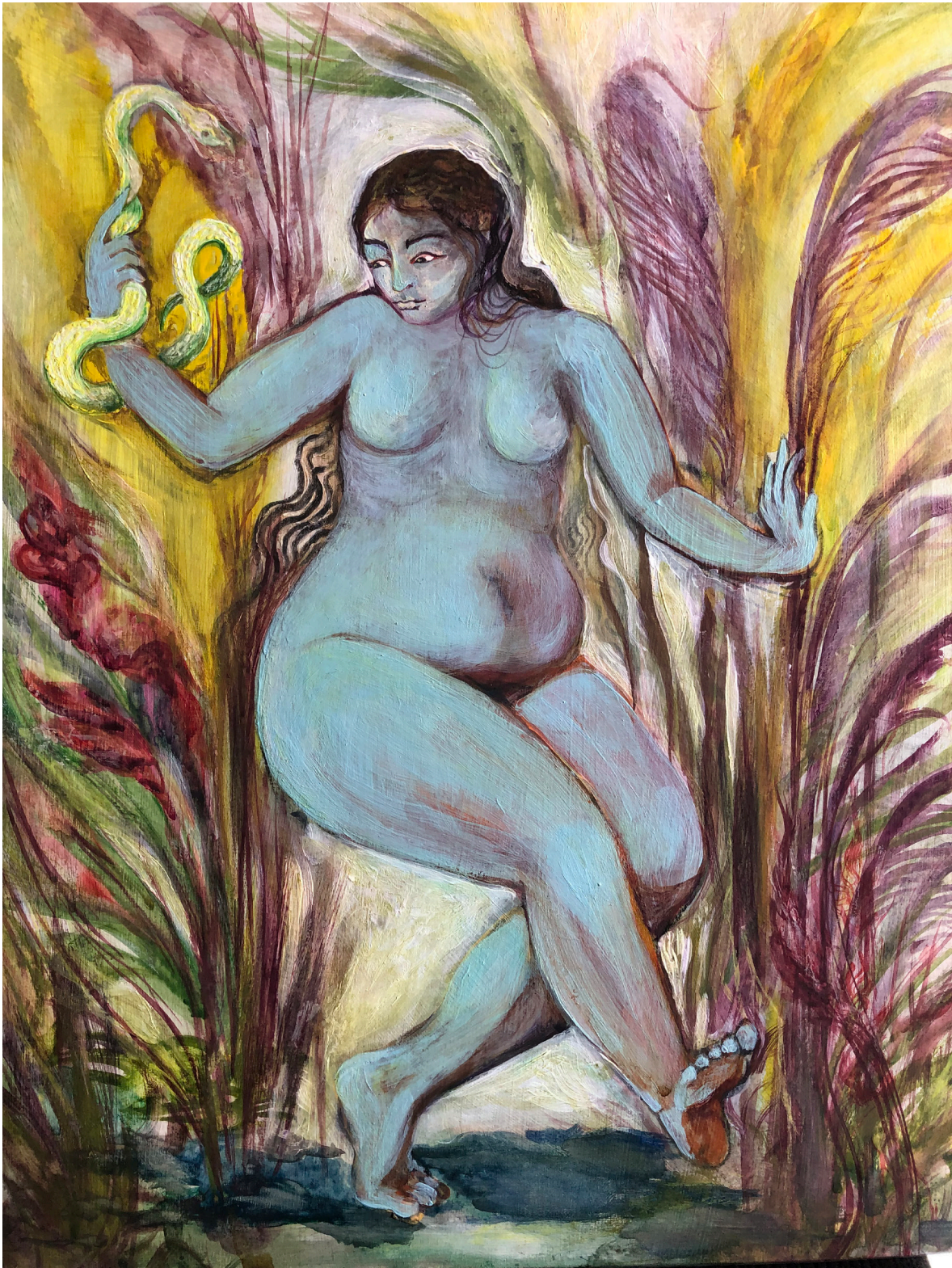
Olivia Mansfield (@olivesalchemy) is an is a semi-figurative painter living and working in Milton Keynes. Her artistic background spans many different genres and inspirations, from historical and classical painting and iconography to religion, faith, ritual, symbolism, culture, folklore and Sci-Fi-esque themes. Whilst her wide array of interests might appear a bit overwhelming, her work is tied to the self: as a woman, as an artist (and as a working mother). Her artwork explores the intertwining narratives between the artist, the Cosmos and the universe.

In short: her work unlocks the magic of the world, Mother Earth (Gaia). It is not only her Instagram name and handle which signifies Mansfield's love for magic and for the occult, but it is her curiosity in the universe which leads the artist to explore such themes through history, the history of art, present and future art world landscapes.

Growing up, the artist recalls "climbing trees, foraging in the woods and not wearing shoes" throughout her childhood. From an early age, she was exposed to many religions and religious practices, from Christianity and Paganism to Quakerism and Buddhism. Her hometown, Milton Keynes, is the site of the first Nipponzan-Myōhōji Peace Pagoda (Japanese Buddhist Temple) in the Western Hemisphere, completed in 1980.

Hailing from a liberal, academic, yet religious, family background, Mansfield explains the positives of growing up around multiple faiths: "I grew up in a Christian community, and people were practicing their faiths, actively." She continues, "There was so much crossover and there was no division. It was all intertwined." Mansfield notes that her mother is a Vicar for The Church of England (but she is a supporter of, as well as ordains, same-sex marriages).

"What fascinates me is [peoples'] blind faith and that feeling of comfort and security and love that you get in those spaces," Mansfield remarks. One of Mansfield's treasured objects in her home includes a sculpture of the Hindu God, "Shiva"—portrayed in both their male and female forms. Such work highlights her keen artistic interest in "Queerness in Ancient History," she says.



To comprehend Mansfield's interest in magic or mysticism, it is necessary to understand and to appreciate her background. For myself, as someone raised around many different faiths (my mother's family is Unitarian and Buddhist; My father's family is Catholic; I am a semi-frequent subscriber to Tarot readings and spiritual advisors via TikTok), it is a rare occurrence to meet another person who possesses a well-rounded appreciation for mixing Spirituality with Academia. Throughout our interview, Mansfield and I discussed the idea of faith and its grounding abilities. Amidst the uncertainty and chaos in the world, our trust in the universe provides a sense of (blind) faith and (potential) resolution when it comes to dealing with personal anxieties (of which Mansfield notes, affects her life) when dealing with an unknown future.

"I love churches, I love temples, [I love] mosques and any of those kinds of sacred, special, revered, profound places that people go to pray into communion and to worship," Mansfield says. "When I'm in [these] kinds of sacred places," she continues, "I'm speaking to a higher level." Mansfield reflects, "I feel like [...] I'm very quiet and still."

This past year, we have heard a lot of people mention the word "manifestation," or rather the ability to create something or turn something from an idea into a reality (as defined by Tchiki Davis, Ph.D). "In 2023, (with my own anxieties and health anxieties)," I embraced the idea of positive thinking: when life appears uncertain, manifesting good thoughts can help ease worries for a shortened or an extended time period.

For Mansfield, the female figures in her artwork are multidimensional. Women are powerful, solid, celestial beings. As she explains: "I think as a woman, [there is a] the link to our bodies, to the lunar cycle." She continues, "When you look at Paganism, the origins of Christian Art, a lot of it has such drastic links to the sun and the moon and planetary alignments."

Mansfield co-curated an exhibition in London, "Visions of Healing" (alongside London-based Brushes with Greatness Gallery) which dealt directly with magic and the healing power of Art: "I came up with the idea of 'Visions of Healing' as a space where," she says, "you are taken to a place where there is a kind of serenity and harmony, [and] [this] kind of chaos [in life and in the world] is calmed down.

Taking place at Hallam Conference Centre in the West End area of London, the group show brought together 11 women artists: Ava Haggas, Genevieve Leavold, Lara Cobden, Lorna Sinclair, Michele Fletcher, Mary West, Ofelia Botella, Olivia Mansfield, Suhaylah Hamid, Simona Orentaite and Yiwei Xu.

"What we wanted to convey—[at] the heart of London, a very busy city—" Mansfield remarks, "[is that] you are literally [as soon as you] step out of your door, in 'fight or flight mode.'" She continues, "We also wanted to incorporate an element of well-being and meditative states of landscape." Hallam Conference Centre is a medical headquarters. Through the specific curation of artwork in this exhibition, Mansfield co-coordinated a selection of art pieces created by women artists—highlighting the positive, healing, artistic contributions women can bring to the London art-scape.

Mansfield and I continued to speak further about her other artworks included in another all-female exhibition, “Spirit Within,” curated by Brushes with Greatness Gallery exhibited in Greenwich, London in Summer 2022. “Most of [the paintings in ‘Spirit Within’] had the female form,” she recalls, “of basking naked in the moonlight: letting yourself be bold and confident and finding strength within your surroundings and all of that natural energy that swirls around us constantly.”

Mansfield states, “That female essence and that power [of saying]—‘I am [a] woman. I am big. I’m bold. I’m brazen. I walked through fire, just [in] sheer and utter defiance.’”

In the daily chaos of our lives: work life, creative life, home and domestic life, we—as people, as humans and as artists—tend to forget the need to ground and center ourselves in our present circumstances. As women, we are formidable, spiritual, independent standing beings. In one of Mansfield’s artworks shown in the “Spirit Within” exhibition entitled “We Voyage Between Thought and Reality” (2022), (one of my personal favorites), the painting depicts a full-bodied, curvaceous woman basking against a surrealist multicolored background of swirling yellow, red, green and blue colors. Despite the surrounding chaos, the female figure in the painting finds herself in a serene, meditative state. This sense of peace represents an idealized state—grounding the woman and the (woman) artist in her own imagination amidst the craziness in the world.

When it comes to balancing her life as an artist and as a working mum (which “Create!” Magazine celebrates wholeheartedly), Art is truly a form of therapy for Mansfield. “It’s like therapy for me,” she says. “I feel like sometimes I’m bursting at the seams with creativity, with ideas,” Mansfield reflects. “That creative juice that you just need to get out onto the canvas.”

On her advice to other (emerging) artists and working artist mothers, Mansfield reminds creatives to always keep working and to always keep creating artwork. As she explains, “Do one thing each day that has that link to your creative practice.” She adds, “Don’t feel like you should accept that there are opportunities that you can’t afford, just try it. What’s the worst that can happen?”

Motherhood, as Mansfield remarks, “is transformative.” She affirms, “Mentally, emotionally, all levels will be tested, and you will feel exhaustion like you have never felt in your life. To be an ‘artist mother,’ you’re so tired, but if you’re in the studio with some paints around you, even if it’s just sitting looking at one of your books,” Mansfield continues, “to me, I’m imbibing the images and the words.” When it comes to studio practices, Mansfield encourages artists to absorb as much well-rounded research and information about the world as possible. Through our discussion, we speak about how the artist draws (relatable) inspirations via iconic classical, religious imageries and depictions of the Madonna and Child.

To quote a notable female Surrealist artist, Leonora Carrington—one of Mansfield’s artistic admirations—(whose work was included in the exhibition “Surrealism and Magic” at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy, in 2022): “Art is magic which makes the hours melt away and even days dissolve into seconds.” Amongst her other artist inspirations, Mansfield admires magic, historic, classic and contemporary artistic predecessors such as Hilma af Klint, William Blake,

Odilon Redon and contemporary artist Chantal Powell.

“We are on this earth, we are all interconnected,” Mansfield says. “We are hardwired to be connected, but sometimes you [we] lose that frequency and you [we] forget and lose yourself [ourselves].” The world is ever-changing. Life is uncertain. Art is constant and linear (sometimes). As an artist, it is necessary to look at the history of art to build upon the legacies of preceding artists. When viewing Mansfield’s artwork, the females in her paintings are surrealist, dream-like, powerful, bewitching—and above all—magic: tied to the universe, the moon, the Cosmos. As females, we are larger-than-life vessels with untapped potential to heal and to unlock the mysteries of the universe through our creations and our artwork.

Learn more

See additional work and learn more about the artist at:

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