

# CULTURED

## ALL THE FEELS

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Maryam Hoseini, Devin N. Morris and Ser Serpas in Central Park. Photography by Elliott Jerome Brown Jr..

What is the translation between feeling and language, between word and image? It is this space of translation where the art that I am interested in resides; the place where a viewer might observe, hear, smell or touch something indescribable. In this perceivable but not nameable phenomena, one finds the work of Maryam Hoseini, Devin N. Morris and Sera Serpas.



## **Maryam Hoseini**

We are taught in painting, if there is a body we must believe it as a body: if it can exist in the painting in a way, it can, should, must, exist in reality. Maryam Hoseini thrives on this inconsistency. She is a poet that makes paintings. Words and lines can mean many things and she revels in their ambiguity. No plane remains stationary, why must it? Through her titles, color palette, installation, Hoseini deals in a perfume whose name we are never meant to know. There is, she notes, an implication of sexual in the unfamiliar.

Hoseini's paintings strike me every time I see them. They are semi permeable, opaque on purpose, similar to the homosocial spaces that are prevalent in her native Iran. Take for example, *Overseas (Horizon)* (2017), a long abyss blue trail of paint extends from the painting, to the wall to floor, joining wall and canvas as if to say there is no difference between the two. It is the visual equivalent of a group of people walking past you in their own conversation, with their own inside jokes, extending onwards, through you, away. In private, or the perceived private, everything happens, anything is possible.

I feel a kinship with Hoseini. When we are all together, when I feel most at home, it often feels just like her paintings, headless bodies with arms outstretched. Not much feels better than seeing yourself in a mirror that feels crafted as though it was thinking of you too.



### **Devin N. Morris**

Devin N. Morris' multifaceted practice is a partnership that straddles video, photography, collage, painting, poetry, publishing and curation. It grows and changes and each part leaves room for the other to evolve. "We are always making sense of where we are," says Morris. "In the day, in the practice, you always come to a sense of understanding something and then continue to move forward." In living and seeing, Morris observes a going over, a continual circling, and employs his mediums in a similar fashion.

Morris finds it easy to share. He is generous with his time and energy. Between his work on 3 Dot zine and the Brown Paper Zine & Small Press Fair for Black & PoC Artists in Brooklyn, Morris' practice reaches its arms around its viewers: "there's room for you right here" it says over and over. The comfort of this notion runs parallel to the humor and playful formality of his collage and video works. Morris flows so easily between the role of organizer, designer and artist it is admittedly hard to keep up with him.

On the topic of the difference between his writing and his visual work, Morris notes that he writes about what he reflects and so in a way he finds he is more honest through the veil of symbolism. It is through this nuanced dance between recognizing and not recognizing an image (a cloud that is real, a sky that is painted) that the viewer finds meaning in Morris's work. "I want to be familiar to you because I want you to know how important you are," he says. What is the value of this form of representation? "People are somehow connecting to the freedom," he answers.



## Ser Serpas

Ser Serpas sculptures and paintings clock their viewers, looking them up and down, “position yourself in relation to me” they say and we obey. Serpas’ visual language mirrors her work in sound. The artist deejays from the Internet; jumping from tab to tab, she layers, slows, augments, she moves into a sound and then away from it. Her compositions are ecstatic. They ring in your ears in a nice way, something you would not expect from her sources: goats screaming, horror films, cars revving.

Her sculpture operates in the same way. She molds a familiar thing (a dress, a baby's onesie) just far enough from itself to see its potential. This gesture of knowing and unknowing echoes throughout her work.

Serpas innately understands the systematic violence of American life are located in the naming of bodies and things. In her actions of claiming a material and claiming her identity as a latinx trans woman, she insists on a fluidity of understanding. Serpas weaves anti-portraits that stay in your mind like after images. I cannot look at a particular shade of teal without seeing, *Fake Native* (2016), the hospital gown she tenderly painted and then hung crucifixion style.

The titles of her 3D and 2D work lead directly to her poetry. Serpas' poetry jumps on top of you, as though you are entering a home that is not yours and there are many familiar things and the poems are a dog who has come to the door to say hello or go away, you cannot be sure which sentiment the dog will bring but the hall gets longer as the dog comes towards you and you'll stand there for a while trying to figure out just what to do.