

ON THE COVER

Möbius Rising by Allison Zuckerman

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on October 28, 2024.

What is going on in this month's cover piece with its busy montage of body parts, women's faces, and hair? Toy crowns and cartoon birds jar the impression suggesting humor or perhaps irreverence and even sarcasm. But if the picture is a visual joke, do not laugh too hard because there are hints of something more serious as well. One of the faces in the upper left looks startled, even panicked, and the hair braids are repeated as if using bloneness to make a point and perhaps not a pleasant one. Looking more closely does not unlock any unifying meaning but encourages further searching. Medieval banners curl at the top, their words unknowable, and colored squares like enlarged digital pixels emerge from the background, if it is a background. *Möbius Rising* is like a strange party that has exploded into chaos, its troubled participants caught in their own parody. Then there is the title. Möbius strips originated in mathematics and refer to surfaces that cannot be "oriented." Take a ribbon of paper and do a half-twist before joining the ends. The result is a Möbius strip, a form with only one side wherein clockwise and counterclockwise are indistinguishable. The outside becomes the inside, and vice versa. That might be what this month's cover image is about, an inside continuously becoming its outside over and over as it "rises" to become itself.

Allison Zuckerman, a Brooklyn-based artist, created our cover image and confirms an interest in irreverence, a lack of respect for what is ostensibly serious, in art and life. The roots of this attitude are not obvious. As a child, she attended her older sister's art class one day and the spark of creation was lit, encouraged by teachers and concerned, but ultimately supportive, parents. Concerned because it is one thing for a daughter to enjoy and excel in art making and another to fashion an income and career from this interest and talent. Nevertheless, and alongside siblings pursuing medicine and data science, Zuckerman succeeded. She studied Fine Art at the University of Pennsylvania and went on to a Master of Fine Art degree at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She soon learned that artists seeking shows could not just "apply" to have their work accepted by a gallery. Posting her paintings on Instagram instead resulted in messages of

interest and studio visits by gallery representatives and art collectors. These in turn led to purchases and showings and an invitation to be a resident artist at the Rubell Museum in Miami. Zuckerman's paintings and sculptures are in the Rubell in Washington, DC, the Akron Art Museum, and the Arlington Museum in Texas, to name a few. She has shown internationally in many countries, including Belgium, Brazil, Spain, Denmark, and Germany. Now a full-time artist, Zuckerman hopes to add teaching to her activities.

Her preferred media include acrylic paints because of their vibrant colors and rapid drying time, but she likes to combine them with photographic printing directly onto canvas. Both techniques are present in *Möbius Rising*. Influences on her art include Eric Fischl's dreamlike scenes, Jenny Saville's fleshy interpretations of the female body, and Dana Schutz's integration of figurative and abstract elements. Zuckerman finds pure abstraction with no human imagery or symbolism too "open." She misses the representation that provides guidance and implies a narrative. It is hard to convey empathy, vulnerability, and a personal presence with color, shape, and line alone.

The irreverence embedded in Zuckerman's work may stem from a fascination with the way beliefs and prejudices, like sexism and anti-Semitism, twist life and art into narrow channels of oppression. Art history itself is full of judgments that call for contradiction. She was struck by the Nazi's 1937 Munich exhibition of "degenerate art," which included many great painters from Georg Grosz to Paul Klee. They were deemed degenerate for their Expressionist style and for not portraying Nazi stereotypes of racial "purity." These stereotypes comprised representations of Nordic masculinity, femininity, and nationalism. Jewish artists like Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani, and Emmanuel Mané-Katz were automatically placed in the degenerate category. Zuckerman created a series of paintings, reconstructing and combining the insipid Nazi imagery with motifs and symbols drawn from the Jewish artists. Art can refute and ridicule the ideas that fuel oppression, thereby transforming their meaning. Perhaps that is a message that can be taken from this month's cover.

 R. Walter Heinrichs
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