

# *Queens and Vagabonds*



**Paintings by Gina Litherland**

Cover image: *Memphis Minnie and Frankie Jean*, oil on masonite, 29 ¼ x 17 ¼ in., 2002

Blues guitarist and song writer Memphis Minnie recorded her song “Frankie Jean” in the 1930s, paying tribute to her fast-trotting horse. The other animals in this painting appear in the lyrics to many of her songs in which animals represent everything from men she knew to elements of her own personality.

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Haggerty Museum of Art  
Marquette University



## *Queens and Vagabonds:* Paintings by Gina Litherland

As a child, Gina Litherland was an avid reader. Her youthful imagination was sparked by reading the tales of Hans Christian Anderson, Lewis Carroll and the Brothers Grimm. Litherland grew up in Gary, Indiana where she spent countless hours investigating the habitats of insects and forest creatures in vacant lots and woods near her home.

While attending college at Indiana University, Litherland first saw Luis Buñuel's classic surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* and Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*. These films, according to the artist, "influenced my own interest in exploring narrative through painting." Litherland went on to pursue a career in painting by attending the Art Institute of Chicago. Over the years, she has developed an intricately detailed style of painting that beautifully combines her interest in narration, literature and nature.

Desire, ritual, intuition, femaleness, the natural world, the human/animal boundary, children's games and memory are the primary themes found in Litherland's work. Poets, writers and artists--Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, André Breton, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Bruno Schulz, Angela Carter, Shirley Jackson, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter

Bruegel the Elder and Frida Kahlo—to name just a few, continue to inform her paintings. The artist also cites hermetic philosophy as an important inspiration behind her work. Each one of Litherland's paintings, however, tells its own unique story.

In 1992, Litherland and her husband, Hal Rammel, moved to Cedarburg, Wisconsin to take up residence in a renovated 120-year-old barn. The house is surrounded by woods and filled with books, art, cats and dogs; this rural locale is an idyllic and inspiring setting for Litherland's creative pursuits. While Litherland's work has been shown widely and has appeared in numerous international publications, the artist has remained a somewhat well-kept secret in Milwaukee. *Queens and Vagabonds* marks the first solo exhibition of Gina Litherland's paintings to be presented in Wisconsin. The Haggerty Museum of Art is honored to showcase this exquisite body of work.

Lynne Shumow  
Curator of Education

## In the Artist's Own Words

The painting methods that I use, traditional indirect oil painting techniques similar to those used by fifteenth-century Sieneese painters, combined with textural effects created by using various tools other than the paint brush, allow me to create a detailed, layered, and complex surface of images recreating the experience of looking at the forest floor with its rich blanket of diverse matter in various stages of decay. Suddenly, an object emerges and comes sharply into focus.

While some of my paintings begin with an idea that I have been ruminating over for some time, or are inspired by a particularly compelling book or folktale, others occur quite spontaneously, beginning with a decalcomania underpainting which suggests forms that emerge and develop into a personal narrative. The act of painting becomes a complete process of revelation. A mysterious narrative emerges, Rorschach-like, from a turbulent, chaotic ground of color and texture. Myths, dreams, memories, and phantoms of pigment suspended in medium are in continuous dialogue with one another. Dormant images ignite slowly, as our eyes adjust to their dark submerged brilliance.

Gina Litherland

## Acknowledgements

Wisconsin has a storied tradition of visionary and surrealist artists from the mid-twentieth century, many of whom are represented in the Haggerty's permanent collection. Gina Litherland is a striking example of the next generation of regional surrealists through her works of painterly virtuosity and mysteriously engaging narrative.

Congratulations to Lynne Shumow, Haggerty curator of education, for a fine job of curating the exhibition and bringing Litherland's work to Milwaukee audiences. Thank you to Daniel Herro, head preparator, and Ric Stultz, assistant preparator, for installing the exhibition in a thoughtful and careful manner. And thank you to Gina Litherland for being so helpful with every phase of putting this exhibition together. The exhibition was made available with the support of the Joan Pick Endowment Fund.

Lee Coppernoll  
Acting Director



*Germination* is a painting about being uprooted, blown in the wind and transplanted.

*Germination*, oil on masonite, 24 x 30 in., 1993





"On the moon we wore feathers in our hair, and rubies on our hands. On the moon we had gold spoons." (from *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, a novel by Shirley Jackson)

*Life on the Moon*, oil on masonite, 24 x 18 in., 1995



Tropism is by definition the turning or bending movement of an organism toward or away from an external stimulus.

*Tropism*, oil on masonite, 12 x 9 in., 1998, from the collection of Terri Kapsalis and John Corbett





Inspired by a fado song by Caetano Veloso, each character in the boat reflects a different approach to uncertainty and danger.

*The Argonauts*, oil on masonite, 12 x 9 in., 2000



*Dinner Party* is a tribute to the manners and habits of raccoons.

*Dinner Party*, oil on masonite, 18 x 14 in., 2001





The tango generally is a dance that dramatizes the relations between the sexes. In this case, the woman struggles between her attraction to the sunflower and her need to control it.

*Sunflower Tango*, oil on masonite, 13 ½ x 11 ½ in., 2003



*The Goose Girl* is a Brothers Grimm story of a princess estranged from her own royalty. The quote at the bottom of the painting (“En effet, ils furent rois toute une matinee ...”) refers to a poem by Arthur Rimbaud called *Royalty* which tells the story of a man and woman who shout to the crowd in a public square: “Friends, I want her to be queen!” and “I want to be queen!” The quote translates into English as “They were indeed sovereigns for a whole morning.” The tale and the poem share one meaning: that each of us is sovereign of our own world.

*Goose Girl*, oil on masonite, 20 x 15 in., 2004





The painting refers to Sister Jeanne des Anges of Loudun, France in 1634, who claimed that a daemon entered her convent through a bouquet of roses.

*Daemon Roses*, oil on masonite, 16 x 12 in., 2004



Arthur Rimbaud's poem *Parade* (or *Sideshow*) ends with the line: "J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage." Louise Varese translates this as "I alone have the key to this savage sideshow."

*Sideshow*, oil on masonite, 17 x 12 in., 2006, from the collection of Hal Brun and Jeff Ginsberg





"Owl's Net" is the name of the particular string figure that the woman has woven with her fingers.

*The Owl's Net*, oil on masonite, 12 x 10 in., 2007



A collection of things that bring good luck. Whoever looks at this painting will be lucky.

*Good Luck Painting*, oil on masonite, 14 ¾ x 11 in., 2007



## Works in the Exhibition

1. *Germination*  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 30 in.  
1993
2. *Life on the Moon*  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 18 in.  
1995
3. *Nerrivik \**  
Oil on masonite  
30 x 24 in.  
1996
4. *Habitation \**  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 18 in.  
1998
5. *Tropism*  
Oil on masonite  
12 x 9 in.  
1998  
From the collection of  
Terri Kapsalis and John Corbett
6. *Jack of Diamonds \**  
Oil on masonite  
26 x 18 in.  
1999
7. *The Argonauts*  
Oil on masonite  
12 x 9 in.  
2000
8. *Daddy-Hex \**  
Oil on masonite  
18 x 14 in.  
2001
9. *Dinner Party*  
Oil on masonite  
18 x 14 in.  
2001
10. *Memphis Minnie  
and Frankie Jean*  
Oil on masonite  
29 ¼ x 17 ¼ in.  
2002
11. *Sunflower Tango*  
Oil on masonite  
13 ½ x 11 ½ in.  
2003
12. *Goose Girl*  
Oil on masonite  
20 x 15 in.  
2004
13. *Daemon Roses*  
Oil on masonite  
16 x 12 in.  
2004
14. *Sideshow*  
Oil on masonite  
17 x 12 in.  
2006  
From the collection of  
Hal Brun and Jeff Ginsberg
15. *The Owl's Net*  
Oil on masonite  
12 x 10 in.  
2007
16. *Good Luck Painting*  
Oil on masonite  
14 ¾ x 11 in.  
2007
17. *Enigmatic Stranger \**  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 18 in.  
2007

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