

# NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021 [nightgallery.ca](http://nightgallery.ca)

Yxta Murray, "Laura Lancaster at Night Gallery," *Carla*, May 8, 2019

carla

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Laura Lancaster at Night Gallery

—Yxta Murray



You don't have to be a woman who's terrified of the future to appreciate Laura Lancaster's paintings, but it helps. Her pastel-colored canvases, wherein she uses water-based pigments to create frantic, disarticulating landscapes and portraits of disappearing women, evoke erasures of all kinds. Her work invokes death, aging, the fading of memory, and even the falseness of social roles.

In Lancaster's solo show, *Running Towards Nothing*, this spectre of erosion and loss dawns slowly. Initially, the work appears to dole out untroubled pleasures. In *Reappear* (2019) an Anglo

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lady gazes at herself in a vanity; she's molded out of messy salmon-brown strokes that indicate ringlets and plump shoulders. But *Reappear* is no Jane Austen homage: the subject's face soon melts away and her arms deteriorate into blood-like drippings, while Lancaster's lavish use of white to blur the painting's surface hints at the dissolving of this life into the next. *Spectre* (2019) also first strikes the viewer as a cheerful image of a girl in dishabille, but the subject's head softens into brown smears as she applies lipstick, so that her left eye looks like an abyss. And in *Ghost* (2019), a departing girl merges with a whitened mirror like something out of *The Matrix*. In Lancaster's mirror motif, women vanish as they try to see and transform themselves, creating a complicated argument against nature and patriarchy's preferences for youth and obedience.

Other images show bodies splintering during storms whose winds blow away existential landmarks, such as place and time. In *Afterglow* (2019), a dark-skinned figure in a feathered hat submerges in a pool of multihued confetti, as if she is descending into a cosmic version of a McDonald's ball pit. In *Nowhere* (2019), Lancaster floats a genderless suggestion of a person (with a red howling mouth) in a cataract of sherbet swirls.

The lovely pink, green, and opaline tones of Lancaster's palette offer her hard truths as if in a delicious layer of fondant; her strategy recalls how some women shore themselves up against catastrophe by leaning on accepted brands of femininity. Lancaster performs a subtle critique of femme culture by merging prettiness with harbingers of getting older, perishing, and buckling under aphasia. Her art creates a gendered *memento mori*, reminding us of how the certainties we rely on the most (from delimited social identities to family) cannot protect us against havoc, because they are either built on lies, or just can't last.

April 25–May 26, 2019