

An abstract painting featuring a rich palette of colors including deep reds, oranges, yellows, greens, and blues. The texture is highly visible, with thick, expressive brushstrokes and areas of color blending. A prominent white, textured line curves across the composition, possibly representing a horizon or a path. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and depth.

I, SUBMERGED:
Paintings from Cabbage Beach

by Cathy O'Reilly Hayes

Artist Statement

When my lovely pal Mary offered to pick me up in her old jeep for very early morning walks in Nassau on our favourite beach. I agreed and in time found that I needed to let go of keeping up with her energetic strides, I found myself just dropping into the ocean and floating instead, and that's when my new journey began, of letting go, stillness, and maybe a bit of awe.

I fell deeply in love with the ocean the first time I flew over the Bahamas with my husband. I had never seen so many shades of blue from the blackest blue; anthraquinone blue to a vivid turquoise blue, the likes of which I had only ever seen on my beautiful aunt Mary's eyeshadow, never in nature. I immediately wanted to paint the ocean but lacked the courage.

On my last trip, I found myself photographing my floating legs almost guiltily and I saw something in the photographs that I liked. They became the jumping-off point for this show. I loved the way the water created patterns with the light and the flesh, everything mingled and dissolved, there was a sense of oneness, perhaps as Sue Hubbard writes in this introduction "The amniotic fluid of the womb is the first ocean we encounter". As I got braver I,

Submerged myself and videoed the body in motion underwater. Their fraction created an even greater dissolving of the body, suggesting a beautiful dissolution of myself into pure colour. Over the years I swam with all kinds of sea creatures, fevers of stingrays, and schools of parrotfish even the occasional shark, each of these experiences is a privilege that is embedded in me.

What I realised while thinking about all the things around paintings, is that it takes a village!! And as such should be acknowledged. I want to thank my lovely friends in Nassau for embracing me back, Mary for allowing me to come on your morning walks, which are truthfully a near-religious experience, and Thierry and Joie Lamarre for your interest and help always, my ongoing relationship with my fabulous Turps mentors and wider community, my sister for holding my hand all the way and curating my work, and of course Martina for spotting these paintings and giving them a chance, with wisdom and great insight and Tom and HK for everything!

Thank you all for your support and love.
Cathy

I, Submerged

an introduction

by Sue Hubbard

Liquidity has long been connected to the feminine. The amniotic fluid of the womb is the first ocean we encounter. A place where we float and dream, safe within the watery cradle of the mothering body. Water is the life force. We're made of water. We bathe in it, cook with it, drink it, cleanse and purify ourselves with it. Pour libations to our various gods. Mysterious and untameable, its boundaries are forever fluid and changing. The sea has long been considered a feminine force in Judeo-Christian thought and Enlightenment philosophy. In many cultures water is a symbol of hope and purification. It represents depth and a downward, inward energy. To submerge is to seek transformation, baptism. When we float on water's holding surface, we are still, we are quiet, we conserve energy and take stock. The Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao Tse said: 'Weak overcomes strong, soft overcomes hard'.

The mermaid, the Celtic, shape-shifting selkie seal and Sedna, the Inuit Goddess of the sea, all link the feminine to water. In traditional Chinese culture, women are closely associated with water and the symbol of Yin is both soft and flowing, yet powerful and strong. The metaphors associated with fluidity imply what is felt and intuitively arrived at, rather than rigidly

imposed. The depths of the sea and the ocean are analogous to the subterranean world where we explore the unbounded experiences of the feminine psyche. Diving down into its darkness, we discover who we really are. In feminist psychoanalysis, l'écriture feminine suggests the fluidity of female language, in opposition to structured, more arid, masculine grammars. Postmodern fluidity has allowed women to re-write and re-gender myths and fairytales, to take ownership of differing narratives and stories that in the past have been told to us by men.

Cathy Hayes lived for many years in the Bahamas. It is still a place she visits frequently. Light pulses through her paintings and underwater photographs. The base yellows, the contrasting daubs of green, blues and blacks. The touches of fiery reds and iridescent colours of parrotfish. To dive into this watery world of the Caribbean is to lose the self in nature, to discover the other: marine plants, the coral, the teaming shoals of rainbow fish.



When she submerges herself completely in the warm waters, it is, she says, as if she's dissolving. In his 1930 work, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Freud famously came up with the concept of the 'oceanic feeling' whereby the tiny infant was not able to distinguish itself from the mother. Exchanging letters with Freud, the French novelist and mystic Romain Rolland describes this 'oceanic feeling' as something mystical, something that enables us to be at one with the universe. It is this experience that underlines most religions. Sometimes, as Cathy Hayes swims, the horizon appears slanted, at other times a storm might be brewing on the land. Such moments of awe, of connection are fleeting in this busy modern world but such is the well spring from which her art flows.



'I, Dissolved'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
150 x 135 cm

'I, Floating 2'

Acrylic & mixed media on canvas

90 x 120 cm





Previous Page
'I, Floating 4'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
150 x 135 cm



'I, Floating 5'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
100 x 145 cm



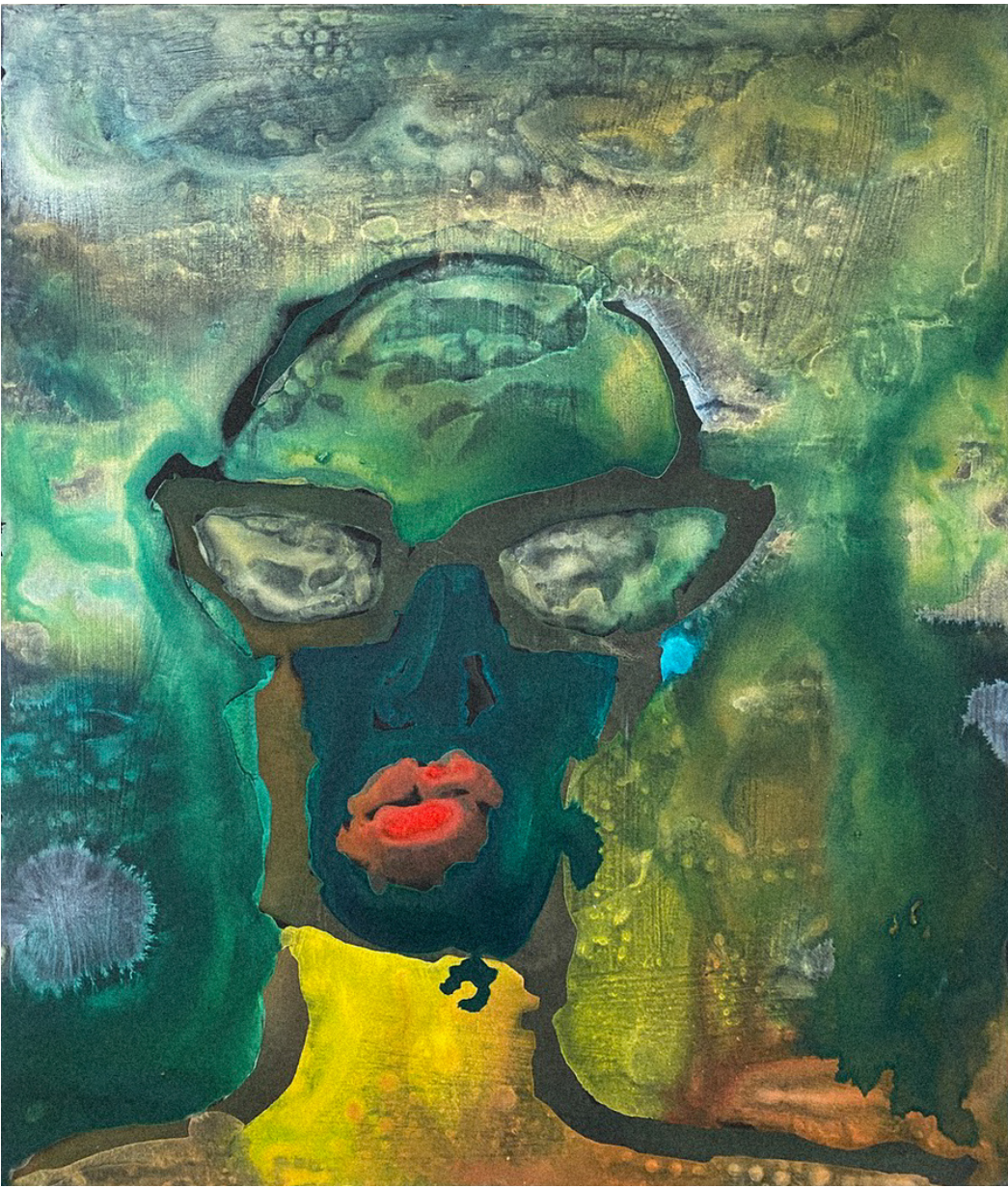
'I, Floating 1'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
90 x 120 cm



'I, Floating 3'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
150 x 135 cm



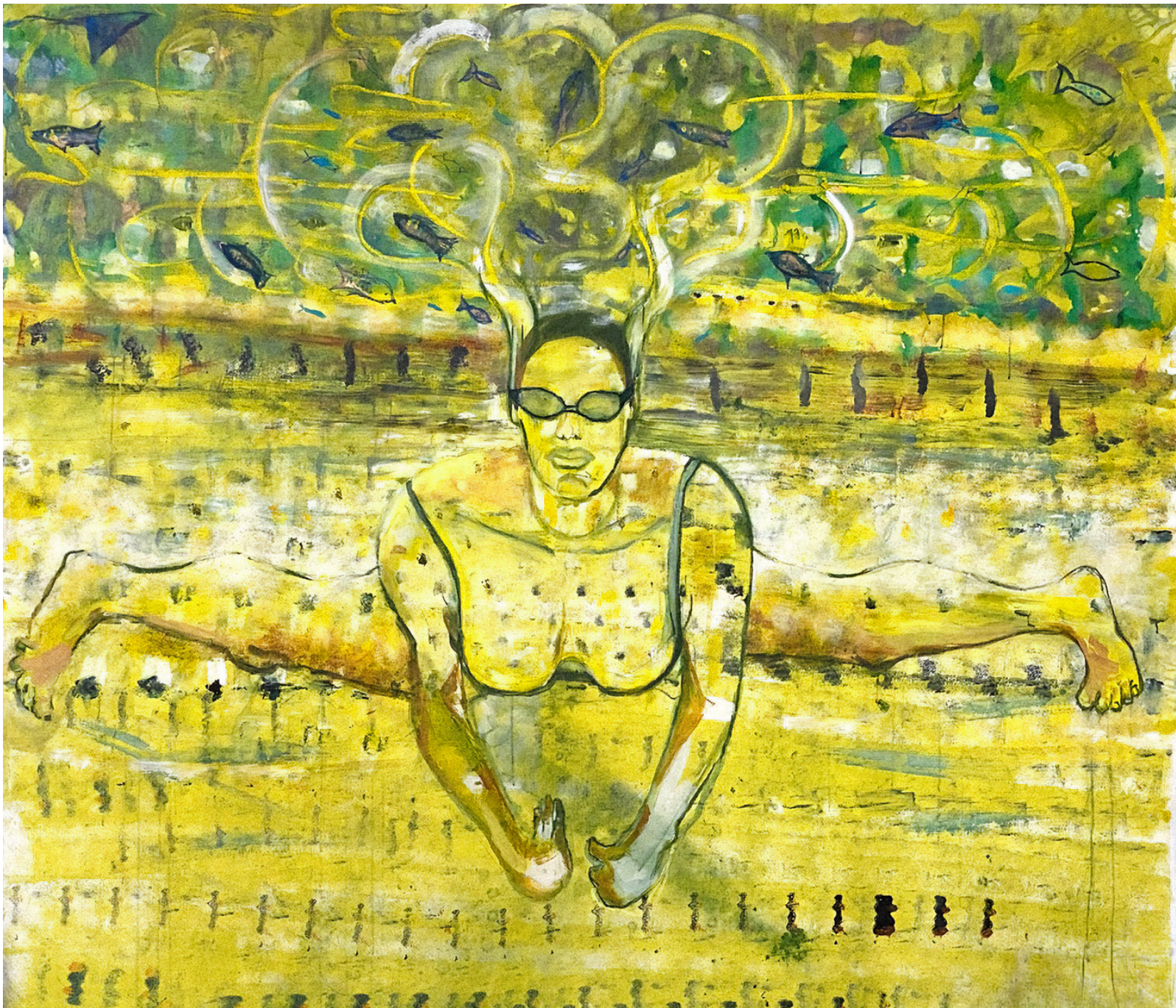
'I, Submerged 2'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
150 x 200 cm



'Submerged Self Portrait'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
70 x 50 cm
85 x 65 cm (framed)



'I, Submerged I'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
135 x 150 cm



'I, Submerged 3'
Acrylic & mixed media on canvas
170 x 200 cm

“To submerge is to seek
transformation”

Sue Hubbard

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'Floating 1 to 5'
Photographic prints on aluminium
30.5 x 30.5 cm





About Cathy O'Reilly Hayes

Cathy O'Reilly-Hayes is a contemporary artist based between Dublin, London and The Bahamas, whose work is a playful, spirited inquisition into society's impediment towards hearing women's voices. It also explores women's relationship with themselves and examines the idea of reclaiming women's power through art. Hayes' tools include the restitution of iconic figures such as the Virgin Mary in contemporary scenarios, the recreation of powerful female Baroque artworks and re-imagining bygone stories and myths. Her new body of work finds a deeper connection to herself through both memory and lived experiences through floating in water. This change of direction emerged from connecting more to nature during and since the pandemic, from finding space and time to see both the past and present in a different light.

Hayes' artistic training initiated in the Chelsea School of Art, but took on a central role when living in the Bahamas and formally retraining at a local art college. Her work was acquired into The D'Aguilar Foundation collection in the Bahamas. In 2019 she undertook The Summer Residency Program at the Slade School of Fine Art and Camden Arts Centre. In 2020, she completed a Masters in Painting at UAL Camberwell College of Art, London with the resulting work being exhibited extensively in London. She has also developed an ongoing relationship with Turps Banana and has recently exhibited with a London group of Turps artists.

Artwork Enquiries

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With Thanks

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Martina Larsson Fitzrovia Gallery....for the opportunity

fitzrovia gallery