

# Inka Essenhigh | Fine Art Globe

Review by Ken Kurson

It was with great delight—even a sense of relief—that 100 or so art lovers descended on the opening of a promising painter's new exhibition. At the Inka Essenhigh exhibit of new paintings at Miles McEnery, visitors had their temperature taken before admittance and were asked by contact tracers to list their phone number. It's a tolerable inconvenience well worth the good will of seeing fresh art, being around fellow appreciators, and seeing the NYC-based artist herself greet her public. Which seemed to include a good number of relatives, plus an assortment of friends and classmates from her days at SVA, from which she received her MFA in 1994.

Ms. Essenhigh told the Fine Art Globe, "I paint the world that I want to live in: a fantastical world which still celebrates the here and now."

Essenhigh has been on something of a hot streak. Recent solo exhibitions include the Susquehanna Art Museum in Harrisburg, the Kavi Gupta Gallery in Chicago, the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, the Baldwin Gallery in Aspen and many more. Internationally, she's enjoyed solo shows at Victoria Miro in London plus shows in Brussels, Venice, Edinburgh, and Salamanca, Spain.

A quick trip through the Chelsea show makes it obvious why Essenhigh's stock is rising. In these colorful, dreamlike images, one can spot influences ranging from comic books to anime. But this isn't really pop art nor is it completely surreal. Often there are straightforward representations, but the longer one looks the more one notices something's just a little off in a way that evokes the psychology of the greatest fairytales.

As the handout aptly notes, "The works on view display story book fantasias that often rearrange familiar elements of daily life or the natural world into

something disquietingly picturesque. Her dreamlike paintings, populated with woodland scenes, Baudelairean flowers and mystical beings, offer an animistic responsiveness in which plant life in non-Anthropocene beings become cyphers for human-like behaviors and feelings."

I'm embarrassed to include so many \$10 words in just a couple sentences, but whoever wrote this really nailed the element that's simultaneously both charming and uncomfortable about these images.

Ms. Essenhigh actually explains her work quite ably herself. In a [stylish video](#) the gallery produced to accompany the show, the artist explains exactly what she hoped to achieve. "With these works, I've made a world that was very defined and three dimensional so that you can walk into it. Or at least. you can grab it. It's as if they were sculptures."