



Julie Heffernan, *Self-Portrait as Twins in Limbo*, 2001, oil on canvas, 67½" x 70".
Littlejohn Contemporary.

Julie Heffernan

LITTLEJOHN CONTEMPORARY AND P.P.O.W.

Though nominally self-portraits, Julie Heffernan's paintings are better described as allegories of the self played out through the iconography of art history. But because they owe as much to contemporary concepts of the socially constructed self as to mythology, their resemblance to Old Master paintings never feels dated or stale.

In these full-length nudes, Heffernan quotes directly from Velázquez, appropriating the demeanor and stance of his portrait of the Infanta, transforming the usual introspective attitude of self-portraiture into one of self-presentation. Portraying herself at various stages of life and sometimes as a twin of both genders, she constructs ambiguous narratives, all of which transpire in exotic forests reminiscent of 17th-century Europe's fantasies of the New World. Rousseau's Edenic vision is everywhere, but tinged with an androgynous eroticism that is all psyche and strangely removed from the sensuality of nature. It is this eerie sense of misplacement, both physical and historical, that gives these paintings their offbeat punch.

Heffernan quotes liberally from bygone masters, ranging from Watteau to Martin Johnson Heade. In *Self-Portrait as Quarry*, her full skirt is a cascade of expired animals that recalls Chardin's still lifes of dead hares.

Heffernan's technical mastery is breathtaking; the plethora of images—prodigal displays of fruit, flowers, exotic birds, animals, and foliage—dizzying. Yet none of it ever comes off as gratuitous or affected. In Heffernan's world, the self is forever wandering in the jungle of the imagination, which has few boundaries and no fixed time.

—Kit White