

## Curator Statement

### **Maggie Shirley**

In this day and age, what is reason and what is unreasonable? Are the heads that talk of reason using reason? Do those who are guided by intuition and emotion see with clarity and wisdom? These are some of the questions posed by *Pan-dulum: A Call to Unreason*, a series of paintings and sculptures by Deborah Thompson.

Deborah Thompson's latest body of work is a new direction for the established artist. Prior to this, Thompson's work consisted of a degree of realism with elements of abstraction. The artist struggled creatively with how to further the abstraction. Thompson found the answer with the use of stencils.

Stencils are usually thought of in terms of street art, craft or print-making techniques. They are useful for making repeated copies of images and for making them quickly. Thompson has used them for repetition but not in the way of street art. The repetition is random in direction and place.

Thompson's use of stencils reminds me of American artist Christopher Wool and his use of roll-on wallpaper tools to create abstract images. The wallpaper speaks to the domestic but the presentation reflects the chaos sometimes found inside the home. Traditionally, chaos has often been associated with Eve, Pandora and other female trouble-makers. Thompson tilts her head at a different, smelly, horny source of chaos, the Greek god Pan.

Pan is at home in the meadows and mountains. The ancient Greeks believed that those who entered his territory could be filled with Pan-ic if he chose. Anyone who has been lost in the woods or faced a rockwall or a steep ravine may have felt the presence of the goat god. But looking at contemporary society, where do we most often encounter panic? Most likely, it is either at work, on-screen or in traffic. The wilds where we go to seek calm. On the other hand, it is the reports of flooding, of hurricanes, of fires and record heat waves that we watch on screens that may have caused the muscles in our gut to tighten. Sometimes we look for solace in meditation, in relaxants, in exercise to the point where they become extreme addictive or obsessive behaviours. The search for ease or comfort becomes escapist. This is the pendulum that Thompson plays with in her work.

Thompson's techniques echo the concept of pendulum swinging between points. She has created darkly-imagined sculptures in bright, primary colours. The faces in all her work are frightening and yet remind us of comic images. The paintings speak of figures in agony paired with absurd or playful elements. It is within these unreasonable contradictions that we are startled then amused. They speak to our guts and then to our minds. The pendulum of our emotions swings wildly at first. As we watch it slow down, it comes to a balance somewhere closer to the middle. It is in this place that we can become an observer of, not a reactor to, our panic.