

ARTFORUM

INKA ESSENHIGH

FRIST ART MUSEUM

NASHVILLE

919 Broadway

May 27–October 9, 2016



Inka Essenhigh, *Green Goddess II*, 2009, oil on canvas, 72 x 60".

Filled with fantastical paintings that becloud the currents between humankind and the natural world, this survey of Inka Essenhigh's work unveils the artist's gentle progression from flat, graphic works—evocative of Japanese woodcuts and various anime traditions—to more softly articulated compositions that call to mind early Disney and, of course, Bosch and Bruegel: the animator's narrative forebears. With hot, acidic colors, Essenhigh contrasts the inner beasts of our nature against environmental forces both inevitable and engineered. *Green Goddess II*, 2009, offers up a ghostly green earth mother—a classically gendered figure—tentacled and gliding through a sensuous forest of blossoming pink and white flowers. *The Woodsman*, 2012, a darker take on the 1992 cartoon movie *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*, has an orange-clad man with a chainsaw demolishing trees while a nervous fairy panics in the dark wood behind him. Other works take on the weird, parasitic aspects of person-to-person interactions, too: Essenhigh's update on Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, titled *Spring Bar Scene*, 2008, has exhausted-looking bar staff serving a morbid mass of emerald-hued ghouls who are losing fingernails, exposing breasts, licking one another, and passing out—so vulgar, so fun.

The artist's gummy and exuberant characters are lurid, sensual beings, saturated with desire, guilt, and joy, who, unquestionably, share some DNA with the sad, comic, and erotic figures we find in the paintings of Lisa Yuskavage, Dana Schutz, or Nicole Eisenman—like Essenhigh, present-day Surrealists unafraid of plumbing some of our most sticky and harrowing depths.

— Anne Prentnieks