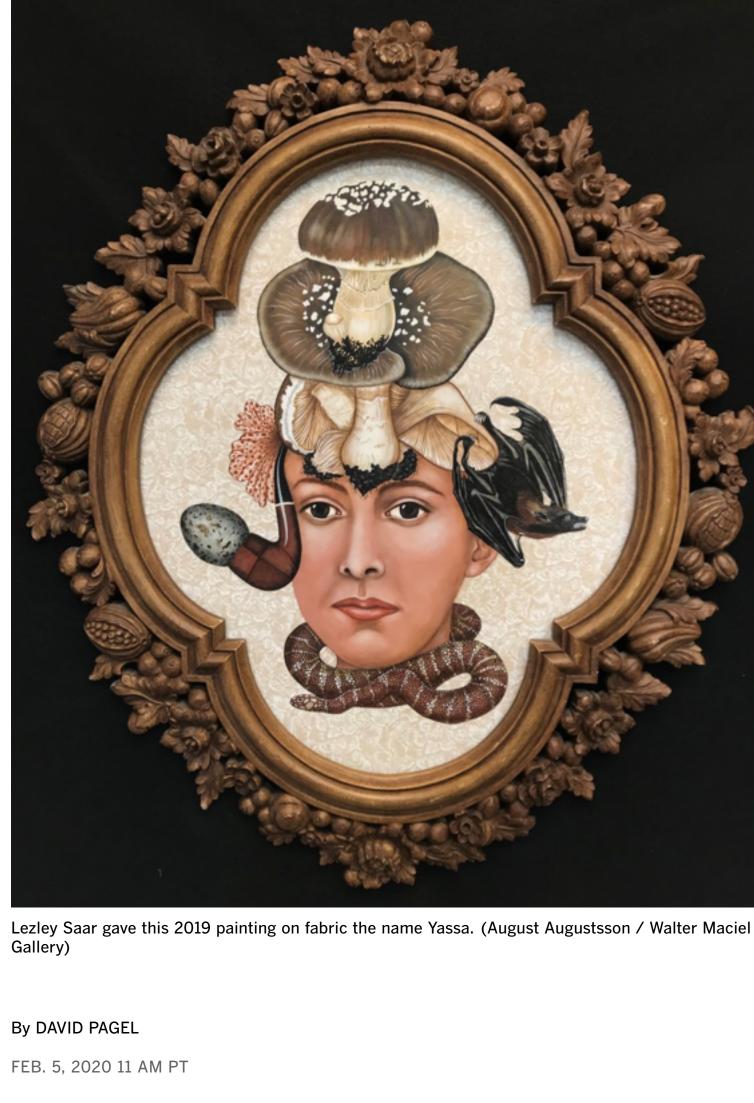
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Review: Yassa, Septime, Burvis. Meet the magical

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women of Lezley Saar's world SUBSCRIBERS ARE READING **TELEVISION**



Angeles artist.

If all works of art are self-portraits, Lezley Saar's exhibition at Walter

Maciel Gallery in Culver City paints a fascinating picture of the Los

Populated by 21 distinct personages, "A Conjuring of Conjurors"

reveals that identity is a lot more complex than it's often made out to be.

In Saar's hands, the self is neither singular nor unchanging: It's a gateway to other selves, a stepping-stone to community, a portal to the beyond.

the past, present and future. Each of her altars consists of some combination of a life-size sculptural figure, a large painting on luxuriously woven fabric, an intimate and meticulously rendered painting in an antique frame or a large group of photographic collages,

some whimsical, some haunting, some both.

Saar has installed her exhibition so that it resembles a series of seven

shrines — sacred places where visitors may commune with spirits from

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The guardians are adorned with handcrafted necklaces, brooches and belts, from which hang keys, seeds, plants and beads — along with an

Lezley Saar, "Nesida is a hit-or-miss mindreader. Sometimes tears trickle from her ears when she is overwhelmed by the inner feeling of others," 2019. Acrylic on fabric, embellishments and curtain

Rather than giving her works titles, <u>Saar</u> has given them names.

On the back wall across from the entrance is Septime, a blue-eyed

black woman painted on a mural-size tapestry that hangs from a

carved wood curtain rod. She is guarded by Paonne and Fernest, 7½-

foot-tall manikins dressed in flowing robes, patchwork skirts, dazzling

rod, 64 inches by 53 inches. (August Augustsson / Walter Maciel Gallery)

blouses, ornate shawls and shimmering scarves.

Septime's hair.

assortment of charms and talismans. Their heads, sculpted from tufts of jet-black polyester fiberfill, resemble thick puffs of smoke, which

give them a ghostly presence and echo the shape and color of

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clairvoyant; Yassa, a shape-shifting trickster; and Burvis, a hunchback philosopher who, fueled by libations, weeps and dances through the night.

the protagonist from J.K. Huysmans' "Against Nature"; Ozile, a

Lezley Saar's installation "A Conjuring of Conjurors," 2020, including Paonne, Septime and

Saar provides thumbnail descriptions of these phantasmagorical

beings. Septime is "a collector of breezes, hoarder of voices, and

is a forest spirit who makes potions from leaves and rainwater.

gatherer of olfactory ephemera" who "once changed her lover into a

lake to protect him." Paonne is a time-traveling shaman, and Fernest

Another grouping includes Fokusnik, a Russian alchemist; Esseintes,

Fernest (Lezley Saar / Walter Maciel Gallery)

As a painter, she marries realistic details and fantastic apparitions. As a sculptor, she repurposes found materials with verve and aplomb, skillfully — sometimes magically — transforming ordinary things into

extraordinary incantations. And as a collagist, she cuts and pastes

discarded bits of imagery into unexpectedly resonant constellations of

its American variants — in the dust. Saar's artistry is a form of magical

realism. Scrappy and ravishing, it's, at once, down to earth and out of

and creating wholes greater than the sum of their parts.

Saar hops, skips and jumps among media, extracting the best of each

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Lezley Saar Where: Walter Maciel Gallery, 2642 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A. When: Tuesdays-Saturdays, through Feb. 22 **Info:** (310) 839-1840, waltermacielgallery.com

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Lezley Saar, "A Conjuring of Conjurors," 2020, installation view including Lefu, Clotille and Mourna (Walter Maciel Gallery)

possibility. Her works take visitors on trips that leave European Surrealism — and

this world.

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