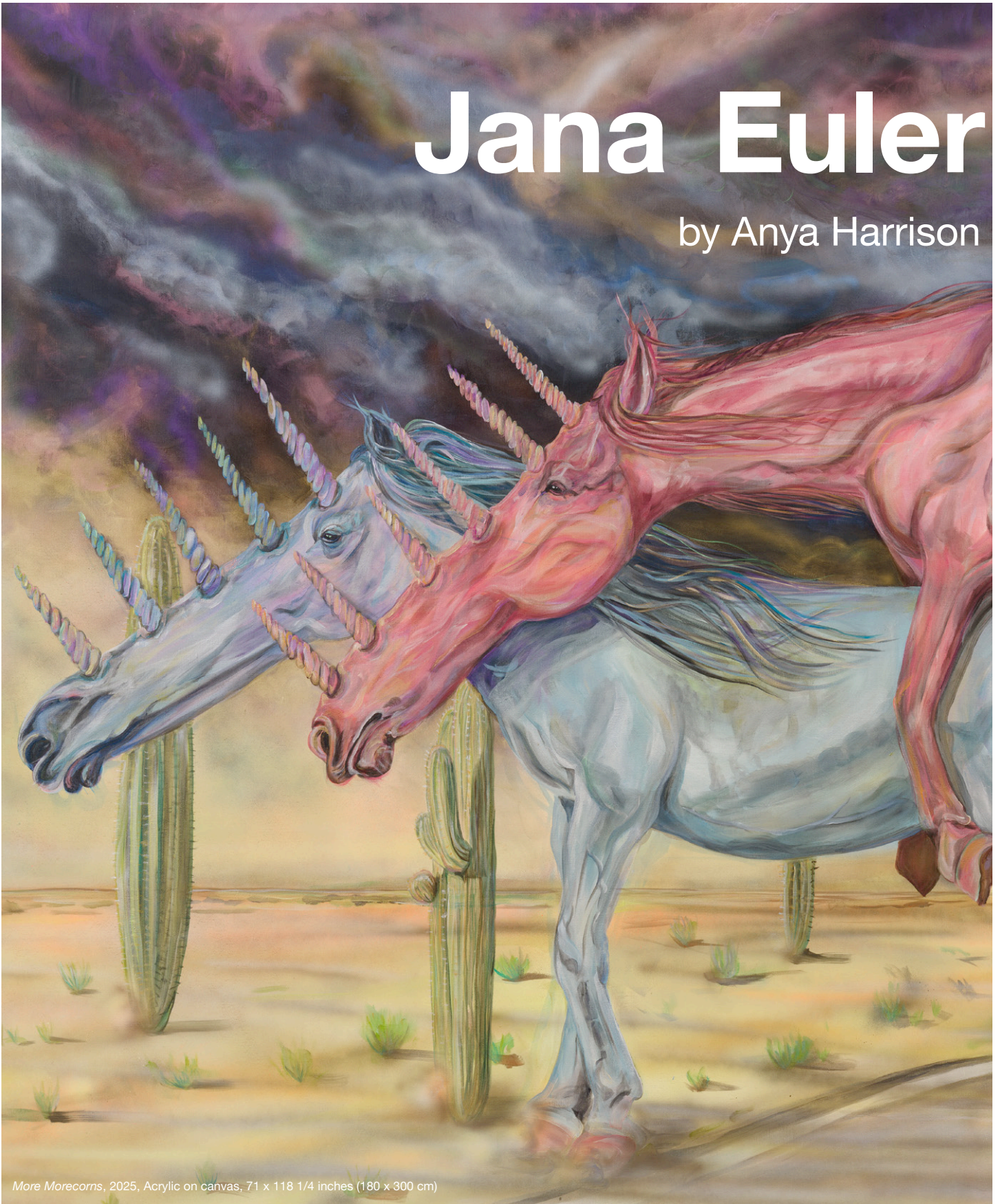


GREENE NAFTALI

Arcane

Jana Euler

by Anya Harrison



More Morecorns, 2025, Acrylic on canvas, 71 x 118 1/4 inches (180 x 300 cm)



Harrison, Anya. "Jana Euler." *Arcane*. May 2026: 178–85.

Who has ever really noticed, been struck by, really engaged with the inherent funniness of Jana Euler's art? Flicking through the pages of *Exhibitionism* (2024), the first extensive monograph dedicated to Euler, and which reads like a *catalogue raisonné* of the artist's work to date, I'm struck by the tongue-in-cheek humour of the book's title, an *-ism* implying an all-encompassing statement or movement, if not an outright manifesto. It signals completion, a wholeness. Yet, here I am, writing about an artist who has consistently eschewed any self-inflicted commentary on her own work (I did speak with Jana, under the condition that no direct quotation would filter or transpose itself directly into my text), trying to assemble the pieces of this giant *kunst* jigsaw puzzle into something resembling a portrait of the artist. It's an endeavour that elicits a bout of silent but nervous laughter.

Bad sex is awkward. The best way to diffuse the situation is to laugh about it. One of Euler's very first exhibitions, held at 1822 Forum in Frankfurt in 2007, was simply titled *Sexpressionismus*. The exhibition booklet was an A5 piece of paper with a circle cut through the cover. When unfolded, it revealed a series of line drawings, sketchy renditions of the sculptures and paintings in the show. In one drawing, which replicated the square frames of the

paintings hanging in the actual gallery space, Euler pits two perspectives against each other: a minimalist ovoid shape appears to be exiting one of the frames, yet, when looked at frontally, this initially nondescript shape morphs into a human backside. The perfect circle of the booklet cover, to all intents and purposes, has become a peephole into a world of saggy bottoms.

In *Borderline* (2008), an exhibition held the following year at schnittraum // lutz becker in Cologne, this almost inappropriate (by art historical standards) liaison between figurative painting and abstract, minimalist, hard-edge sculpture was even more overt. Here, the metal line-drawing sculptures with humanlike dimensions effectively also functioned as hanging systems for paintings which themselves replicated the same schizophrenic personality of their 3D counterparts, but on canvas. In an accompanying text, penned by artist Nicolas Ceccaldi, he notes that "Sculptures stand around as awkward/hilarious metaphors for abstracting devices ... There is a point beyond which such increasing honesty reveals the object without shirts, skirts, and jeans, naked and vulnerable like most of us and probably in the same alternative space." Like bad sex between two strangers, the resulting awkwardness and self-consciousness of limbs can only be dispelled by an embarrassed giggle.

Nowhere is this put to the test more than in *The female brush painting the female brush with the female brush at the dentist's office* (2023), a painting of monumental scale and an allegory, if



*The female brush painting the female brush with the female brush at the dentist's office, 2023,
Oil on canvas, 118 1/8 x 130 in (300 x 330 cm)*



Harrison, Anya. "Jana Euler." *Arcane*. May 2026: 178–85.

ever there was one, of the trials and tribulations of a modern-day artist. Everything here is stretched to the limit. The female brush *painting* stands erect, hand on hip, face in a concentrated frown, pouting, her head of hair coalescing into a dribble of post-coital paint drops that arc their way towards their libidinal object of creative desire, the female brush *being* painted. As for her, she's lying horizontally prostrate and flattened on the patient's chair, her face, with its heavy eyebags, twisted into a sign of resolute despondency, the metal collar around her neck akin to some medieval torture device. Despite the rigid posture of this particular brush, as well as that of the third and final brush of the title – the *tool* without which none of this would exist – the painting is buzzing with energy. Following art historical tradition, perspective lines vie with each other and propel the gaze into a state of neurotic movement, enhanced by the fact that the three framed images that can be spied in the background, stock visuals to be found in any doctor's office anywhere in the world, all deal with objects of speed. The dentist's office seems to proffer what might be a simple but universally valid moral: the task at hand is not always pleasant, it may even be painful but necessary. The fact that the brushes' naked bodies are each decorated with the cursive script of their brand name – “da Vinci” – and a barcode seems to say it all. Has artistic genius, through market over-stimulation, made a pact with the devil? Has it been reduced to a signa-

ture with no substance?

A larger-than-life owl stomps its way down a concrete urban cityscape, past anonymous-looking office buildings (*On the way to the studio*, 2025).

As a stand-in for the artist, the intimidating seriousness of its determined stare and claws poised in mid-leap are only slightly diminished by the ruffled feathers on the scary-but-cute beast's body. Animals have, since forever, served as avatars for human beings (Kafka, Orwell, Gilles Châtelet or *Aesop's Fables* are just a few examples), proffering thinly veiled satirical takes on the myriad ways in which our bodies and minds cope with the drama of simply existing. If Euler's work participates in this lineage of offering up some lessons for the practice of everyday life, it does so by diffusing the enormity of the situation, or as fellow artist Dena Yago recently put it, the 'dark fantasies of the technological sublime', by jabbing it in the ribs and ridiculing it through an incessant playing with scale and perspective. The army of small glazed ceramic sharks (*great white fear*, 111 small ceramics, 2021), positioned on a low plinth, their individual faces sculpted into caricatured manifestations of fear (although some look like they might also be having a laugh), that were part of Euler's solo exhibition *Oilopa* (2024) held at WIELS, is downright comical. It is the same fear that this species naturally instils in our popular imaginary, and for good

reason (just think of *Jaws*), but when flipped on its head, the question mutates into: are sharks also not allowed to make a misstep? When under pressure to perform, and with so much at stake, **the mighty beast of the ocean shows himself to be ultimately just as human.**

There is something not just grotesque, but borderline monstrous, in these works, in the ways in which bodies, faces and perspectives are stretched, distorted and folded in on themselves, sometimes almost beyond recognition. The more recent addition to Euler's menagerie is also its most fantastical one. Introducing the *morecorn*. Painted using a *My Little Pony*-esque palette, the morecorn is a hybrid creature: neither simply a horse, nor a unicorn, it is their contemporary relative, one sporting as many spiky, horn-y appendages as can possibly fit on its dangerously disproportionate muzzle. Why have one when you can have many? And why have many when you can have *more*? This is what *More Morecorns* (2025) seems to imply in Euler's typically not-so-subtle manner. In this painting, two of these mythical beasts are caught fucking on Route 66, in a cacti-filled deserted landscape, overhung by moody swirls of blue and purple clouds worthy of the 18th century Anglo-Irish writer, philosopher and politician Edmund Burke (he of the first philosophical exposition on the sublime and its aesthetics). What once inspired fear, awe and fascination because of its capacity to compel and destroy is now bound to market rules and non-stop reproduction. Exponential and infinite growth is the cornerstone of capitalist economic

structures, but where there's a bubble, there's also the possibility of a crash. The pink and blue pair of *morecorns* are less horny than they are dejected. There comes a time when things just go limp, as evinced by *Where the energy comes from, connected* (2025), an updated version of Euler's painted portraits of plug sockets. This is one plugged-in composition, energy secreting from it like bodily fluids, but instead of ecstasy the look on its "face" is more akin to shock and terror. Whatever latent eroticism resides in the frame has been diluted with a good dose of collective exhaustion and depletion.

For Euler, it all comes down to a point of view. In a space-time (aka today) where everything is ultra-connected and permanently ON, who has the right to demonstrate fear, to fuck up, to fail or show signs of fatigue? It's tempting to read one of Euler's studies of the human body (*Under this perspective I*, 2015) as a full-frontal symbol of artistic virility, a pair of feet taking up the entire length of the human-scale canvas, their extremities turning into what, at first glance, could be easily read as a phallus and its double. Closer inspection, however, reveals it to be none other than a portrait of Euler herself, seen from a perspective which pushes distortion to its breaking point, the artist's arms raised in a posture resembling a plea for help. Except what we have here is a figure lying down, visualised from a perspective that is neither the viewer's nor the painting's subject. Appearances are misleading. This is where the Marxist adage comes to mind, that history first repeats itself as tragedy, then as farce.



Harrison, Anya. "Jana Euler." *Arcane*. May 2026: 178–85.