

Internal Secrets

Kathleen Loe's unexpected images of femininity

by [Joseph Clark](#)



[click to enlarge](#)

For many people, the Blackhawk helicopter is a distinctly masculine expression of military might. However, to New Orleans-based artist Kathleen Loe, this war machine stands for the contradictions and complexities of femininity. It is one symbol in Loe's shifting visual language that seeks to express the texture and formidability of womanhood.

"It has sheer physical beauty – I find it exquisite," says Loe. In her *Seduction and Surveillance* exhibition at 1point618 Gallery, the Blackhawk's shadow recurs in paintings and prints. It represents something that appears ephemeral, but whose true character is tough and, if need be, deadly.

"It contains an internal secret," Loe says. "Looking at it, it could be moving towards ruin or rescue."

If Loe's helicopter imagery is an unexpected symbol of womanhood, the frocks that she paints might appear conventional. However, she presents them in unexpected ways. Standing between five and nine feet tall, paintings of evening wear, like *Hide*, are meant to loom over viewers. At the same time, the dress's red-pink palette, feminine curves, and rich, flowing fabric embody self-confident sexuality.

"They're meant to draw you into dimensions of physicality and sensuality," Loe says of her frock paintings. "They're not particularly warm and fuzzy."

But while the images may appear to wear a lot on their sleeve, Loe says the sensuality is ambiguous. She leaves it to the viewer to decide if the erotic expression is meant to reveal or conceal something about the imagined wearer.

However, a final symbol is meant to bare itself to the world. In *Shock*, a human heart, snowy white, puts something internal – a chilly mood – on the outside. The organ looks barren and ruined, speaking to something lost forever.

Taken together, Loe's images create a tapestry illustrating the anguish and intricacy of women's personalities, which have historically been denied. If she casts some darkness on the feminine condition, it is only to bring it under the same existential shade that masculinity has basked in.