

Huguette Caland

Institute of Arab and Islamic Art 3 Howard Street
January 18–March 18, 2018

A pair of oils on linen serves as the linchpin for this small but powerful exhibition of Huguette Caland's drawings, paintings, caftans, and smocks. Both pictures show mischievous faces emerging from mounds of flesh. In *Sunrise*, 1973, a small male head peeks out from behind a face (or a breast) resembling a stylized mountain. In *Eux*, ca. 1975, an expanse of peach skin morphs into four women's faces seen in full profile. This show in its entirety is just the four walls around one room. These are the only two paintings. But they work like an architecturally dramatic set of double doors, opening up to twenty-one (mostly untitled) works on paper and twenty-six pieces of clothing (including three designed for Pierre Cardin), all speaking volumes about the artist's colorful life, her obsessions, and quirks.

Perhaps most importantly, the careful selection here, spanning more than fifty years, emphasizes the formal clarity of Caland's erotic line—her ability to be sexually suggestive, almost comically naughty, while at the same time penning a feminist political critique of beauty, the body, and expectations of a woman's place. The curation also explores Caland's personal interpretation of the spectrum from figuration to abstraction, finding the crossover in her fashion design and then showing how it echoes in her drawings, where the least apparently representational patterns might in fact be studies for a hat.

The Institute of Arab and Islamic Art opened its first exhibition last spring. This is its second. So far, it has shown the work of five women. None of them are concerned with religious piety or identity politics. All of them are fiercely committed to a certain compositional intimacy and aesthetic

complexity. Together, they prove what a pleasure it is to be surprised.

— [Kaelen Wilson-Goldie](#)