

# Jessie Homer French

## Memento Mori

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**MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to announce *Memento Mori*, Jessie Homer French's first solo exhibition at Casa Corbellini-Wassermann in Milan. This retrospective marks French's return to Italy, following her debut at the Venice Biennale in *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani. As with her previous works, French's paintings in *Memento Mori* are a lyrical exploration of the fragility and beauty of existence, conveyed through soft brushstrokes and a vibrant palette. Her familiarity with local bodies of water and the Californian wildfires is evident in each piece, creating a visual narrative that speaks to the power of nature and the human experience.**

Immersed in the hilly San Jacinto Mountains, the self-taught artist Jessie Homer French depicts environmental catastrophes, blazing fires, shoals of fish and the inevitable death - the end of the world seems incredibly close yet somehow surreal when looking at French's work.

The American artist, blessed with a poetic eye and a deft hand, reminds us of the transience of life, capturing the fleeting moments of existence in a way that is both haunting and idyllic. *Memento Mori* is a celebration of mortality that seems not to comprise pain and grief but rather gentleness, an affection towards a dauntless nature that shelters us while reminding its inhabitants that we are just passing through.

French's work is deeply rooted in her experiences of the American and Canadian landscapes. She notes that these regions become her inner landscape and that it takes a while to internalise when she explores new terrains. Drawing inspiration from her surroundings, French often finds her paintings appearing as if in a dream or from old memories and found images. Symbolic and evocative, her works unfold like dreamlike but looming American scenarios, emphasising the precarious role of humans within them.

Among her works, fire is a recurrent subject. "I live in California - I would like to stop painting fire, but my world keeps burning", comments French. Referencing the heating-up planet and climate change, fire is a metaphor for nature's destructive

power and the constant threat of natural disasters. It burns bright and fierce, illuminating the darkness and consuming everything in its path.

The apocalyptic and extremely contemporary scene in *Spreading Fire* portrays the crackling flames rising silently and spreading horizontally on the canvas. While wildfires continue to scorch French's canvases and California, the artist's work serves as a powerful call to action for climate justice as she highlights the devastating impact of human negligence.

Often depicting death and destruction – which usually comes in the aftermath of fires – the artist consistently challenges the viewer through the use of striking imagery, such as large numbers of deceased fish in pristine water or funerals with heavily adorned coffins that draw attention away from the bereaved. Despite the artist's realistic representation of these scenes, they possess an otherworldly and surreal quality that transports the viewer outside of their present reality and creates a sense of disorientation and awe.

At her solo exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO Milan, French's naïve and flat brushstrokes tell tales of a land steeped in memories and the ever-looming reminder of our own mortality. As fishing buddy and fellow artist Joe Fay dubbed her, French is a "regional narrative painting," portraying the beauty of nature and the bittersweet inevitability of death coexisting in harmony.

**Jessie Homer French**

Jessie Homer French was born in New York in 1940. She currently lives and works in Mountain Center, California, US.

A self-taught artist, her paintings emerge from a continuous analysis of places surrounding her and reveal the artist's personal and profound attitude to a local and transient type of composition. Through a simplified language - only apparently naive, flat colours and calm brushstrokes - Homer French treats with delicate care existential issues related to death, nature and rural life. In her work, humanity appears a toxic intruder in a melancholic nature, and yet, even the paintings with the darkest subjects feature a formal vitality capable of giving extraordinary immediacy to her bittersweet and anti-pastoral compositions, in which creation and destruction coexist with exemplary candour.

Solo exhibitions include: West Coast, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK (2021); Chernobyl, Various Small Fires, Los Angeles, CA, US (2020); Paintings 1978-2018, Mother's Tankstation, Dublin, IE (2019); American Pastoral, Art Basel Hong Kong, HK (2018); Mapestries, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA, US (2015).

Group exhibitions include: Materia Medica, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA, US (2020); Life Still, CLEARING, New York, NY, US (2020); Eighty at Eighty: Recent Gifts to the Permanent Collection, Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA, US (2018); Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA, US.

French's work is included in the collections of the Palm Springs Art Museum and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.