

MELISSA MARKS

*The Adventures of Volitia:
Heroic Burlesque*



THE ADVENTURES OF VOLITIA: HEROIC BURLESQUE

Melissa Marks has created a wonderful idea: a self-aware abstraction named Volitia. Not just any self-aware abstraction either, but an aesthetically promiscuous, abstract character. Marks's achievement is the vigorous, beautiful embodiment of her character on the walls of the Aldrich Museum's Erna D. Leir Gallery.

What is a self-aware abstraction? In conversation Marks asks one to imagine the possibility of one of Jackson Pollock's drips becoming conscious of its surroundings, and rising up from all the other drips (there is a sense of humor at play here) to become a sentient, sensuous entity, an aesthetically promiscuous character in a two dimensional drama. Drawing on sources as complementary as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling and Marvel Comics, Marks has created a whirling frieze of Volitia's adventures which swirls across 17 outsize pieces of watercolor paper. But no page can contain Volitia, who leaps off the paper directly onto the walls of the Leir Gallery—the walls surmounting the gallery's stage, of course.

Marks's creation is exuberant, outlandish, and absurd. In Volitia's absurdity there is the essence of what makes this important art. Marks has captured Volitia's determined efforts, her trials and tribulations, her leap from the page to the stage. This character, constituted from simple, cartoonish lines of watercolor, embodies our own human aspirations and endeavors, which seem so large to us on a daily level, but seen from some distance are perhaps equal parts hubris and humor.

HARRY PHILBRICK

Volitia (as in volition) is an aesthetically promiscuous, abstract character. She is the protagonist in a series of visual narratives which celebrate her own experience. Volitia changes color and form as she interacts with other characters and with the interior world of her own imagination. She is malleable, a constantly mutating fusion of what is inside and outside of herself.

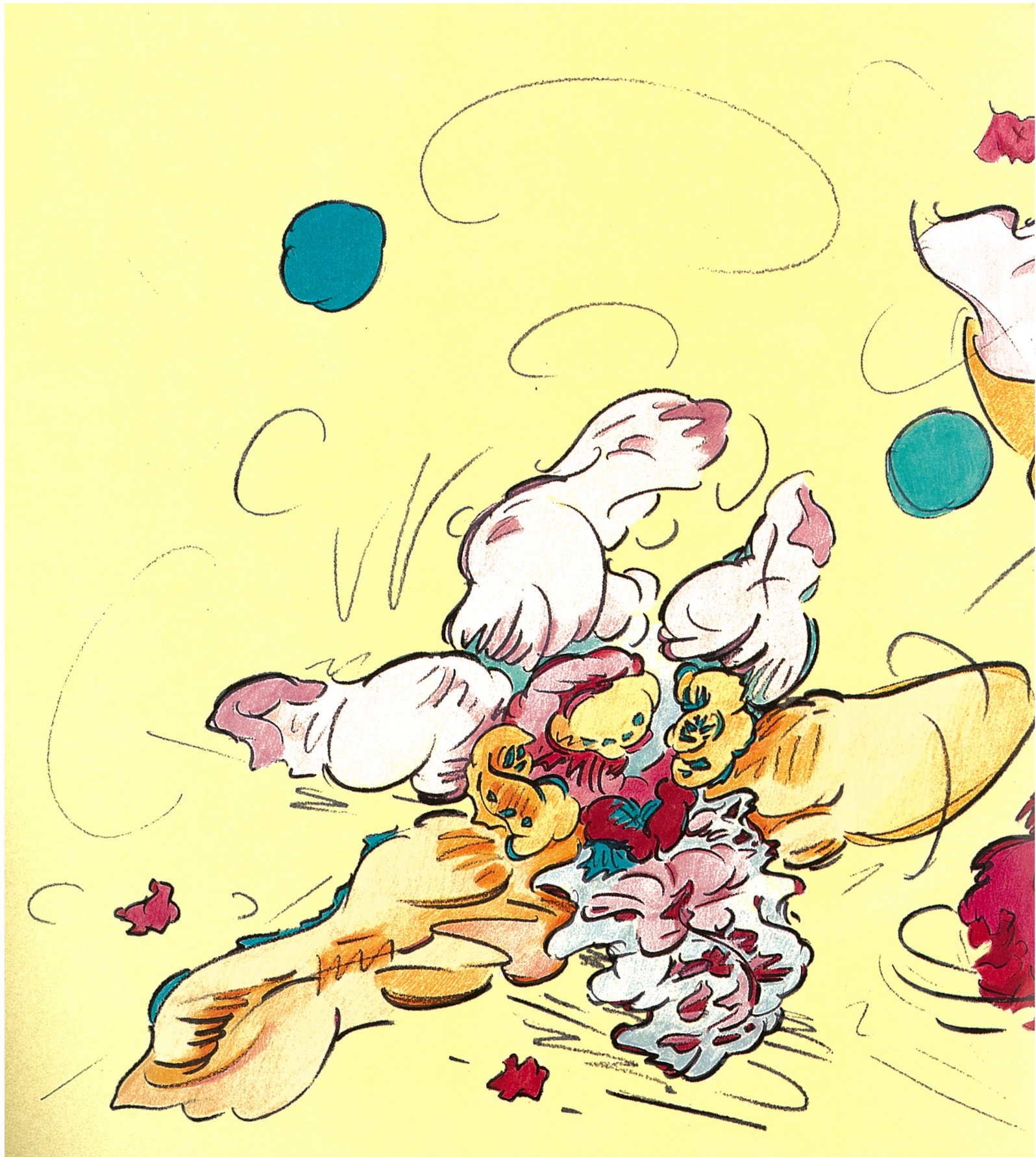
Her *adventures* function as heroic burlesque. The larger narrative, the growing sum of Volitia's adventures, is the story of an introspective, protean self. Volitia is a hybrid hero; part Superman, part hot-house flower and part Eve—creation come to life. She is unselfconsciously an attraction, a sensational persona.

As the first self-aware abstraction, Volitia is able to project visible mutations of herself. She is engaged in perpetual dialogue with her own variations, veering between transfiguration and disintegration.

Volitia proceeds and aspires toward spectacle, toward the visible presentation of herself. As she performs, Volitia reveals her own double nature, which is characterized both by an exultant pomp (a superior belief in an inevitable turn toward arabesque) and by a humble awareness of her own base, unevolved, clown self.

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*Cover: The Adventures of Volitia:
Heroic Burlesque, 1998, detail
watercolor on paper*

*Inside: Heroic Burlesque:
Centerstage, 1998,
color pencil on paper*

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