

# This Haunting New Exhibition Explores Girlhood and Hysteria

A [anothermag.com/art-photography/15669/1st-edition-alexandra-metcalf-ginny-on-frederick-interview](https://anothermag.com/art-photography/15669/1st-edition-alexandra-metcalf-ginny-on-frederick-interview)

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1st Edition by Alexandra Metcalf at Ginny on Frederick Installation View. Photography by Stephen James

## As her new show opens at Ginny on Frederick in London, Alexandra Metcalf talks about depicting notions of madness, domesticity and femininity

Text [Olivia Allen](#)

“I’m obsessed with the history of madness,” explains **Alexandra Metcalf**, the artist behind the new show, *1st Edition*, at Ginny on Frederick. “From a young age it’s terrified and intrigued me.” In this exhibition, Metcalf blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, creating an immersive collage of painting and sculpture, depicting notions of madness, domesticity and femininity.

[61st Edition by Alexandra Metcalf](#)

*1st Edition* derives its title from the packaging of Harry Gordon’s Poster Dress, an emblem of the Mod culture that swept through London in the 1960s. Through her paintings and sculptures, Metcalf immerses viewers in a site-specific installation, tracing the impact of these dresses, and weaving a narrative of liberation and madness. “I was

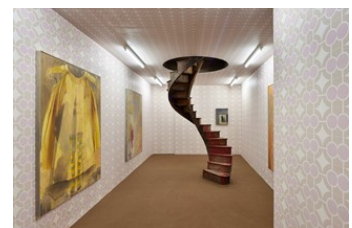
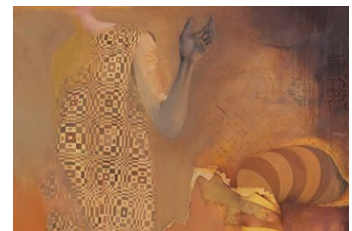
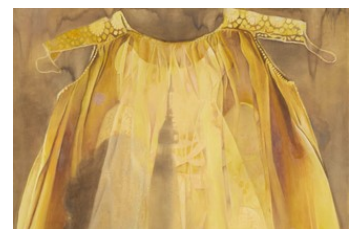
thinking about the size of the space, how it's like a storage unit or a locker," she says. "A lot of my work is about different aesthetics from history and I wanted to make a time capsule ... like a 60s haunted house with peeling walls, the teenager's bedroom as the site of the beginning of some rebellious girlhood."



At the centre of Metcalf's wallpapered world is the spiral witches' staircase leading up into the ceiling of the gallery and the Mad Woman's attic beyond. The 'dissociative' antique object in the centre of the gallery contrasts the kitschy wallpaper and adds a surreal dimension of otherworldliness to the artist's work, creating a sense of expectancy as viewers wait for a character that will never descend the staircase.



The gallery, situated in an old shop unit in Farringdon, serves as the perfect backdrop for Metcalf's work. Founded by Freddie Powell in 2021, Ginny on Frederick has evolved since its initial conception. Having started out in an old loading bay with space for ten visitors at a time, the gallery is now "all grown up, with white walls and all". Similarly, the pair's relationship has grown with the gallery, as Powell explains. "It's all Alexandra's fault I have a gallery really. Ginny was originally a vehicle for organising shows and small publications, the first of which was a show I did with Alexandra when we were finishing up art school in Rhode Island. We rented a medieval-themed hotel room at the Knights Inn in Seekonk and installed all of these wild sculptures Alexandra had made over the bed, and she installed a crime scene work in the bathroom. I then moved back to London and somehow got the keys to my own space."





Alexandra Metcalf, silent forms of interspecies panic, 2024 Photography by Stephen James

With titles like *The Obsessive Sound of Screaming* and *Another Kind of Havoc*, the paintings that make up *1st Edition* feed into Metcalf's world of warped narratives and strange, almost spiritual scenes. Paintings combine comforting motifs like fairytale flowers and stars with an eerie palette that drifts from the vivid pinks found in the pages of fashion magazines into murky earth tones, invoking something mythical and slightly sinister. Metcalf's landscapes are decorated and intricate, with figures and forms half-emerging through transient layers of colour to create an immersive world of mysterious figures and narratives.

*1st Edition* is also an exploration of the complexities of growing up. “I’ve always been obsessed with different rendering of teenhood,” says Metcalf. “I was thinking about the cyclical relationship between the mother and daughter, how one becomes a woman and gives birth to a woman. The autonomy that comes with growing up and designing your own space.” With references ranging from *Teen Vogue’s A Room of My Own* series to Virginia Woolf’s forcibly prescribed rest-and-milk cures, Metcalf’s interest in sites of female autonomy is evident through the installation. The space charts a woman’s development from sullen teenager and hysterical woman in hiding in the rafters, down the stairs into the drawing room of domesticity, as the flowers wilt and the wallpaper peels, with the diligent wife awaiting the return of a sinister and absent patriarch. “I’m interested in the history of domesticity, more specifically the theatrics of hysteria in that space,” says Metcalf. “I’m quite theatrical as a human being. I’m always inspired by space and creating these overly dramatic scenes I have in my head.”

Similarly, through her use of traditionally male-dominated practices, Metcalf explores gendered labour. “I like this narrative of the man going to work and making these heavy-handed objects for industry and the woman being at home playing with buttons and sewing,” she says. “There’s a bit of humour in all of this.” By combining ornamental flourishes with antique objects, Metcalf creates these scenes and sets of off-beat domesticity where you can’t quite put your finger on what’s awry. With previous work centred on woodwork, hammered buttons and wrought metalwork, Metcalf creates quirky narratives, playing with traditional tropes of crafts and labour, subverting the material’s initial purpose as either functional or decorative. “I like maximalism,” she says. “I like the heavy-handed decorative look, the paintings and the walls working together.”



Alexandra Metcalf Courtesy of Ginny on Frederick

For Metcalf, the process of creating installations extends beyond pure presentation; it also drifts into the realms of autofiction and self-mythologising. The gallery becomes a stage where her characters come to life, engaging in dialogue with the space they inhabit. “It’s quite theatrical for me. It’s like autofiction of these weird worlds I’m creating, they are all a part of an opera ... the inexpressible, like a romantic psychosis”. An immersive experience that is nostalgic and unsettling, *1st Edition* is a testament to Metcalf’s ability to intertwine historical aesthetics and personal narratives. By inviting viewers into a space that blurs the boundaries between past and present, and reality and fiction, the exhibition is a playful exploration of what it’s like to be a woman, from poster-clad, pink bedrooms to the world of sinister domesticity and madness beyond.

1st Edition by Alexandra Metcalf is on show at Ginny on Frederick in London until 20 July 2024.