

Gardens of the Pure

Kitty Brophy, Emma Kohlmann, Alice Mackler

Gardens of the Pure brings together three artists who portray female and male nudes in direct, sensuous, and occasionally disquieting styles. Above and beyond the basics, Eros and Thanatos, sexuality, eroticism, and the body's beauty and awkwardness are all integral themes. Often explicit, even uncomfortably so, while alternately entirely unobjectionable, Kitty Brophy, Emma Kohlmann, and Alice Mackler reverse the proverbial "male gaze" in the service of intensely personal, psychologically charged images that can at times also be interpreted as playful and sweet. All three powerfully, unabashedly, and un-self-consciously confront taboo, societal unease, and long-held prejudices against women making art of this kind.

Drawing Room

Kitty Brophy's drawings from the late 1970s and early 1980s reflect the debauchery, decadence, and fun of a distinctly New York milieu centered around Club 57 on St. Mark's Place. A deviant inventiveness and kinky sensibility are wedded to a crucial (and acknowledged) debt to the inky dissipation of Aubrey Beardsley and the mordant wit of Charles Addams. It's a dark gallows domain, by turns thrilling, foreboding, titillating, and occasionally abhorrent, with fishnet stockings, cinched waists, spiked collars, jodhpurs and whips, fetishistic to the extreme, bypassing base conceptions of obsession for a realm infinitely more charged and complex. For evocations of angst, malaise, ferocious sexual degradation, and pleasure, these works have few rivals, combining grotesquerie with Art Nouveau elegance. Coming into the present, beautiful line drawings of vaginas and daisy-chained penises are reminiscent of Ellsworth Kelly flower studies, masterpieces of simple grace. More recently a distilling of theme and a turn towards torsos and single individuals are even more visceral, unafraid of frank depictions, and crucially infused with forthright attitudes and nuance. A candid carnality prevails without any of it being quite "erotica." In self-excoriating self-portraits, flights of Sci-Fi fantasy with giant lizards on leashes about to penetrate submissive figures, and two legs simply and distressingly hanging, Brophy shifts effortlessly from the straightforward to the allegorical.

Northwest Gallery

Bodies in sexual congress, or alone, in all positions and postures, inward looking and definitely naked, along with stand-alone non-figurative mysteries, are the gist of Emma Kohlmann's watercolor and Sumi ink small-scale works on paper. But as the artist says, "I like abstracting the body into something else, that could be living or dead, beautiful and ugly." In that "something else" lies the prepossessing accessibility of what she does, with a pungent intimacy and almost daunting candor. Arms raised, partial limbs, scrunched up, rendered resplendent in richly-hued washes of swampy green into dirty yellow and pink, red, purple, multiple

shades of blue, and grey, with a color shift through a profusion of works providing a spectral progression as one goes clockwise around the gallery. The delineation of limbs and sex organs, bodies distended and deformed but absolutely natural, often coupling, the supposedly “pornographic” acts depicted evince creation itself and have an undeniable magnetism that confounds the prigs as they affect anyone who truly values life in all its conflicted grandeur. The figure, compulsively repeated, with undulating aureoles of auras expanding out from where limbs meet trunks and body part features are distinguished from their “bases” are emanations of energy beyond the physical, with a formal association to Emil Nolde’s sumptuous flower watercolors. Kohlmann probes the corporeal realm to the utmost depths, the end result being visceral portraits of us all at our core that are ravishing and hard-hitting at the same time, executed with a disarming and charming honesty.

Northeast Gallery

In Alice Mackler’s six collages from 2003-2009, fashion magazine editorial and advertising photographs are painted over, the image played with, both revered and messed with. They set the stage for the twenty-five drawings from 2013-2016 in pen and gouache that feature blank bodies mapped out by insouciantly thin borders, expressive and jolly, with vibrating waves of color daubs permeated by a light-heartedness reminiscent of Raul Dufy. Sometimes there are two bodies entwined or phasing into each other, comingling in joyful bliss. Faces aren’t really discernable, but these entities are superabundant in personality, cartoonish amoeba forms instantly recognizable as the shape of humans while being wildly and mischievously free of the constraints of anatomy. They are “stick” but also “balloon” figures, an intriguing contradiction. Bacchanalian, hedonistic, breasts and butts, loose and malleable, coy and Rubenesque, somehow smiling in happiness even if mouths are not detectable, expansive, liberated, and buoyant. To the fine and serious line work Mackler adds unrestrained but calculated yellow, purple, red, and greens in complimentary jazzy combinations, jaunty, alive, and full of vigor.

There is an implicit bond between the three artists and Dorothy Iannone’s “The Next Great Moment in History is Ours,” a print of which, based on the 1970 original, hangs in the MOCA Shop at the intersection of the galleries containing “Gardens of the Pure.” Though not included in the exhibition per se, Iannone’s hermaphroditic, ambiguously gendered, entirely sex and love-positive work is that of an undisputable fellow traveler, an artist who in recent years has reached a much-deserved broader audience and become an influential touchstone to many female artists dealing with graphic, open, and outspoken content. Her example in her own life, work, and attitude, a spirit of freethinking, “ecstatic unity” is a passionate and poetic touchstone to the intergenerational aspect of this exhibition. Her presence substantiates the continuity of universal themes and the essential facets of human nature that are often seen as uncomfortable or

inappropriate, as well as evidence of an understated feminine aesthetic solidarity across the age divide. Formally sophisticated, with line, color, and shape as important as subject matter, the artists gathered together here refute small-minded outlooks with works that cover the spectrum from uncompromising, punishing, and unsparing, to humorous, humane, and sexy.

Kitty Brophy was born in Los Angeles, CA in 1960, and attended the Parsons School of Design in New York. She has a B.A. in literature and creative writing from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and has shown at *Elizabeth Cherry Presents* at the Downtown Clifton in Tucson, AZ, as well as participating in *Sonoran Hot Dog Stand* at Fleisher/Ollman in Philadelphia, PA, and *East Village West* curated by Kenny Scharf and Ann Magnuson at the Royalty Gallery in Los Angeles in 2011. She lives and works in Tucson, AZ.

Emma Kohlmann was born in New York City in 1989 and graduated from Hampshire College in 2011. She publishes her own artist's books and other ephemera such as records and zines, and has exhibited her work throughout the United States, and in Montreal, Tokyo, and Berlin. Her exhibition *Studies in Obscurity* opens at Copenhagen's V! Gallery in June, and she will be included in V1's booth at the 2016 Volta art fair in Basel, Switzerland. Kohlmann lives and works in Western Massachusetts.

Born in 1931 in New York, Alice Mackler graduated from the Buxton School in Williamstown, MA, attended the Art Students League in New York, NY, and has a B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in New York. She has had two solo exhibitions at the Kerry Schuss Gallery in New York, and been included in *Mirror Effect* at The Box in Los Angeles, and *Daughter of Bad Girls* at Klaus Von Nichtssagend Gallery, *Forget About the Sweetbreads* at James Fuentes Gallery, *Unorthodox* at the Jewish Museum, *Mal Maison* at Maccarone, *The Faraway Inside* at Nicelle Beauchene, and *Looking Back/The 10th White Columns Annual*, all in New York, where Mackler resides.