

VANCOUVER

“Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey”

EQUINOX GALLERY

What does it mean for works of art to talk to one another? How did “Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey,” curated by the artist Mina Totino, achieve the sense of a conversation—or, more precisely, several intimate and casually intermingling exchanges—that might arise at an informal gathering, probably in a garden, sometime in spring? This may sound frivolous, but stay with me. Imagine going to a party where each guest is so adept at communicating that only a few words are ever needed. The rest is gesture—that wordless language Giorgio Agamben found to be, by the end of the nineteenth century, “irretrievably lost” to the Western bourgeoisie. As technologies of reproduction developed, Agamben argued, the neurotic recording and subsequent overanalysis of gesture compromised its ease, its liveliness. Totino’s exhibition gathered more than thirty silently eloquent “guests”—largely paintings—that seem to recuperate this lost gestural mode. Indeed, it is testimony to the strength of the nine participating artists that each of their works emerged as a fully fledged persona. No snobs (too self-conscious about their status), no nerds (calculating each move), and no squares (in either sense of the term).

Totino eschewed a singular argument about painting; instead, her organizational logic centered around connecting dots among a group of practitioners who have encountered one another in various ways. Elizabeth McIntosh and Silke Otto-Knapp studied together at the Chelsea College of Arts in London, and Otto-Knapp introduced Tomma Abts to McIntosh, who met Totino when she moved to Vancouver. Totino and McIntosh both teach at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where they met Aaron Carter, Monique Mouton, and Rachele Sawatsky—former students who have become colleagues. Raoul De Keyser, Mary Heilmann, and Bernard Frize serve as important figures of reference here, as Totino describes them as having “removed the quotation marks that held painting in a confining endgame.” Obliquely tracing lines of influence, Totino encouraged gestures from distinct geographies and generations and across materials and processes to forge alliances and dialectics.

The ludic stains and meanders of Sawatsky’s *Imposter*, 2013 (ink, dye, and bleach on cotton), appeared as deft intentional marks alongside the scratchy vertical strokes of De Keyser’s monad *No Title (8 Verticals/6)*, 2010, whose abstraction in turn highlighted the figure in Mouton’s reductive oil on round panel *Hare*, 2013, and those in Otto-Knapp’s barely there watercolor and gouache on canvas *Every Afternoon*, 2009. On the opposite wall, McIntosh’s large and liminally figurative oil on canvas *The Girl*, 2014, announced a different dexterity, making a virtue of awkwardness, and finding company in Carter’s watercolor-and-gouache paintings on irregularly shaped plaster-coated panels, rendered anthropomorphic by such titles as *Lulu* and *Farm & Mott* (both 2014).

Laura Owens’s *Study*, 2013, features a bicycle wheel unceremoniously stuck onto a painted canvas. No doubt a nod to Marcel Duchamp, the work also conjures Thierry de Duve’s 1996 essay “The Readymade and the Tube of Paint,” which draws attention to the readymade quality of commercially available colors of paint, and thus foregrounds the readymade aspect of all paintings. (Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko evidenced a version of this point in 1921 with three monochrome canvases—*Pure Red Color*, *Pure Yellow Color*, and *Pure Blue Color*—in which he intended to distill the elements of painting to their

logical end point.) Totino’s exhibition seemed to insist, conversely, that there is nothing pure about color—it is expressed, and perceived, on an infinite gradient. By extension, there is no end to what might constitute the palette for painting as a communicative gesture. If a wheel can be part of the spectrum, or if a chair can double as a stretcher (as was the case in Heilmann’s juicy orange *Clubchair 34*, 2007), then the territory available to painting is boundless. Indeed, Persian Rose, Chartreuse Muse, and Vancouver Grey are not hues available from Williamsburg Homemade Oil Colors. The exhibition title is pure poetry, meant to sensitize a viewer to an expanded palette, and to the nuance of the gestures that were on display.

—Monika Szweczyk

Elizabeth McIntosh, *The Girl*, 2014, oil on canvas, 73 x 49". From "Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey."

