

Alexis Marguerite Teplin: Entwistle

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"Those who did not live before the revolution," as Talleyrand notoriously claimed, "never tasted the sweetness of life." Despite its obsessive attraction to the art of the ancient regime, Alexis Marguerite Teplin's work has been made in cognizance of more than one revolution. Though far from a McDermott & McGough-style full-body immersion in the past, her project reflects an outsider's fascination for a *douceur de vie* she can only imagine. The London-based American's multifaceted practice includes painting and assemblage alongside less easily classified works like painted-on found posters (these are perhaps better understood as an extension of collage, without any literal cutting and pasting, than a form of painting or drawing) and, at least as presented here, flirts with installation without ever committing to it. No piece quite conforms to the requirements of gallery display but instead shows itself vulnerably, an object stranded in a space. Neither abject nor ironic, they all project nostalgia for a nearly lost construct that might well be called "culture"--or else "femininity."

The scene was set, so to speak, by *chambre a ciel ouvert*, 2003, a painting some twenty-six feet long installed to surround the viewer on three sides like a panorama--but not as a mural, with all that would imply of a solid alliance between art and architecture, desire and power, such as existed during the Rococo era to which Teplin's work continually refers. Instead, it appeared as a sort of theatrical backdrop or vast piece of signage that one could walk around and behind--huge and imposing, yet deliberately unconvincing, ideologically though not materially flimsy. Perhaps the work carried out its self-subversion too well: impressive in its ambition but ready to fall apart at its many pictorial seams.

As self-contained works, Teplin's smaller paintings are more successful. Works like the oval floral *fete gallante, nymphaea*, 2002, or *feverish embarkation*, 2001, allude to the fluttery brushwork of a Fragonard or Watteau while working it up into something far more frantic and febrile. Karen Kilimnik's dreamy ruminations on the fairy-tale worlds of the Russian ballet or the exotic "ultra-Englishness" of *The Avengers* are part of the background here (and so, in turn, must be the spirit of Kilimnik's great precursor Joseph Cornell), but Teplin's paint handling is compulsive and overloaded, transmitting not the indolent eroticism of the Rococo but the hectic

fantasies of the Symbolists. Which is precisely what makes Teplin's paintings more compelling than those of the hordes now affecting versions of Kilimnik's style.

Whether taking the form of furniture or of objects with no identifiable function, Teplin's assemblages often seem the work of a milliner gone mad. Bristling with feathers and rife with doodads, they overshoot the decorative in the direction of the voluptuous, sinister, or morbid. There are also more understated pieces, including one made of a paper dress from the '60s, stained with perfume. Often enough, Teplin seems on the verge of making a "big statement" on one of the themes her work invokes so clearly--history, desire, the feminine--but one's hope of being instructed on what attitude to take is consistently thwarted. The fervent encounter may be stirring enough.

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