

Rosy Keyser: The OtherOther

Maccarone Los Angeles
300 South Mission Road
April 22 - June 17, 2017

The paintings in *The OtherOther*, Rosy Keyser's second solo exhibition at Maccarone and her first in the L.A. gallery, testify to the salvational nature of hard work. Built large, and often of curious and provocative stuff—bits of Dutch wax, plastic zip ties, snake-patterned nylon cables, a pair of red suspenders, sticks—the works carry with them an aura of fierce urgency, the suggestion of a shipwrecked maker forced to reassemble the world from sometimes absurd fragments.

Keyser, who is based in Brooklyn, pulls material toward her like a vortex, scouring neighborhood streets for useful elements, hauling scrap in from the surrounding countryside. The paintings are interested in labor, the process of their own becoming, and the artist's stance toward her materials is generous, humorous, and non-judgmental: Will this do the trick? Preparing her canvases, Keyser often leaves the stretcher bars exposed, creating a symmetrical, open-work grid that organizes a painting the way bones do a body. In *Skeleton* (2017), Keyser brings this submerged reference to the surface, affixing wood-bead seat cushions to the bars at the top and bottom of the frame—shoulder and pelvic girdles—and connecting them with a spinal column made from neural strands of thickly painted fringe. The painting balances precariously between abstraction and figuration, a comic gesture, like a classical *memento mori*, that is also deadly serious.

Throughout the show, Keyser uses these ready-made beaded surfaces (familiar to any taxi passenger) as a proxy for and a study of canvas: the regular grid of cotton duck magnified and revealed. Using an awkward, distorted-scale canvas challenges the artist's mastery of her most basic materials, and forces her to cultivate beginner's mind. Learning to paint gracefully and precisely on beads is like performing a complex dance during an earthquake—an embodiment of the idea that every given is subject to change. In the process of this exploration, Keyser uncovers the deep, orderly elegance of something easily overlooked, exposing its unexpected properties. The material is tough and porous, delicate and sturdy, as much a screen as a portal. The beads, equally there and not-there, reflect perfect equilibrium between negative and positive space.

Forming a philosophical counterpart to the bead paintings is a series of "periscope" paintings that represent a significant development in Keyser's work. Cerebral and composed and yet thrumming with exuberant color, these paintings use circular and elliptical forms to signal lenses and ways of looking, accomplishing from a contemplative distance what the more expressly physical assemblage paintings do up-close—the same gesture arrived at by way of two radically different approaches. Stand close to one and you will see that every point of the surface is considered. In some cases tiny rivers of paint surround the canvas's raised points, making them islands of negative space; in other instances, the center of each point is dotted with pigment, like the nucleus inside a cell.

Finally, what these paintings offer is a new way of paying attention. Documenting the affinities and correspondences Keyser perceives, the pieces meditate on the Zen Buddhist idea of birth and death as a one-word hyphenate. A collection of hard-won observations delivered lightly, the paintings provide a manual for seeing and a promise of thrilling reward for the deep, unhurried, telescoping gaze.

-Dana Goodyear, 2017