

Alissa McKendrick

TEAM (GALLERY INC.)

“Resentment” was a surprising title for a show of five vibrant, high-spirited paintings, none of which immediately gave off vibes of bitterness or rancor, even if their energy contained an understated ferocity. Alissa McKendrick is a fluent colorist with a propensity for subtly dissonant combinations of fruity, saturated hues that produce a jarring, acidic sweetness. Placing her stylishly accoutred female protagonists in spatially nonspecific color fields where they act out equivocal scenarios (motorcycling, nearly naked, past an overturned car, or confronting a seated ape as if engaged in serious conversation, while a second monkey looks on curiously from above), McKendrick conjures an odd and quizzical mood. With a brisk, painterly, and implicitly witty figurative style that calls to mind fashion and children’s book illustration, her work also evokes comparisons with that of contemporaries such as Jane Corrigan, Genieve Figgis, and Ella Kruglyanskaya—though the scratchy drawings of Edward Gorey and the astringent froth of Florine Stetthimer’s paintings might be just as relevant.

In the smallest of the five paintings, all labeled *Untitled*, which is dated 2019, a long-haired figure with witchy red eyes strides across a street in the foreground of a lavender cityscape. (Her hair is a slightly cooler, paler hue of lavender.) She sports a spangly fur coatdress worn open in the front to reveal a pair of tiny breasts, calf-high pink boots, and a wee pink handbag in which an orange kitten sits. In the background lurks another orange cat (the kitty’s mother?), looking over its shoulder at the scene in the foreground; the creature is distinguished by five black dots that represent its eyes, nose, mouth, and anus. In a work from 2018, we see another woman strolling in the foreground, carrying a half-open parasol under a lime-green sun. She has crossed the country road that winds through a greenish landscape where her towering stiletto heels and sophisticated outfit seem unmistakably out of place; we glimpse an urban skyline in the far distance. This woman, too, holds a handbag with strange contents: a minuscule green figure with very long, skinny arms and legs, also wearing high-heels like the lady who carries her. Meanwhile, the roaming woman is being ogled by a naked female—perhaps a girl, or even a miniature woman?—riding down the road in a two-wheeled pedal car in the shape of, yes, a high-heeled shoe.

What do such colorful and eccentric whimsies add up to, though? I may not know just what’s being mocked in these paintings, but the sense of exuberant superiority to whatever the object of derision is seems too effervescent to harbor much resentment. The gallery press release points to Sianne Ngai’s considerations of the marginal, non-Kantian aesthetic categories of the zany, the cute, and the interesting. Yet while there’s a screwball-comedy aspect to these paintings, they don’t quite convey the underlying tension proper to the zany, the indulgent affection aroused by the cute, or the “informative” burden of the interesting. Maybe it’s the evasion of category that’s most striking here: McKendrick’s paintings cast their intangible spell by inflaming the viewer’s desire for an explanatory reading, only to casually deny it.

—Barry Schwabsky



Alissa McKendrick, *Untitled*, 2019, oil on canvas, 14 × 10".