

VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Lehrer, Adam, "Katherine Bernhardt 'Pablo and Efrain' at Venus Over Manhattan," *Autre*, September 14, 2015.

KATHERINE BERNHARDT "PABLO AND EFRAIN" @ VENUS OVER MANHATTAN IN NEW YORK

September 14, 2015



I find myself drawn towards artist Katharine Bernhardt's work in spite of an inner resistance I feel towards work that could be described as "cute" in the most basic of ways. While I love some of the goofier performance artists doing kitschy work in the Midwest like Jaimie Warren, the aesthetic of cute is not something that I gravitate towards. So sue me, I'm affected (becoming a black clad heavily tattooed art writer was probably the only way for an untalented art geek to get girls). But Bernhardt's work is made more wondrous by her demonstration of mathematics. Within her paintings, no matter how silly the imagery, there are real patterns and proportions made of a vivacious color field grid locking her imagery into place. It places the work in the middle of the war between our animal instincts and rational thinking (isn't it weird that the part of our brain that sees things as "cute" is actually our inner apex predators identifying things as weak, but it's our rationale that decided it's ok that it's weak, precious even, hence "cute"). Her work is a visually rich and fun tug of war.

Bernhardt's new show, Pablo and Efrain, opened up last night at Venus Over Manhattan. Bernhardt's

imagery is often directly correlated to the imagery that she is absorbing and the objects that she is using: “Every residency that I’ve done, wherever I am, sub-consciously the imagery of the landscape always makes its way into my work.” During the creation of these new works, Bernhardt was in her beloved Puerto Rico. Therefore, much of the imagery living within the canvases reflects the colorful landscape of the island: sharks, various fruits, turtles, tropical birds and more blend seamlessly with some of Bernhardt’s fascination in mundane objects like cigarettes and sharpies. It’s like the imagery comes from a very unconscious and fluid aspect of her creative mind, while the planning and sequencing of the imagery on the canvas is totally mathematic and precise. With a huge mish-mash of imagery, she still manages to avoid overloading the viewer with sensory. Instead, it’s just a blast to look at her work.

Her interest in patterning also manifests in her fascination with the weaving traditions of the rural Berber women of Morocco. As such, Bernhardt lined the floors of the gallery with coffee bags sourced from Puerto Rico. The bags not only were nice and soft to walk on, but also helped make clear the influences that went into the show: the imagery of Puerto Rico and the precise lines needed to weave such bags

The show’s title, Pablo and Efrain, is an ode to the twin Puerto Rican artists behind the Poncilli Creacion, who Bernhardt met on her most recent trip to Puerto Rico. True to her unpretentious, self-effacing, and effortlessly charming manner, Bernhardt admits she knew nothing of the artists before meeting them. Only that she was completely taken with them when she did. “They’re just really fun and hilarious to be around,” she says while cracking herself up.

Bernhardt was at the opening with her family and son and having a great time. When Norwegian artist Bjarne Melgaard was admiring one of her paintings, Bernhardt covertly snapped a photo of the intimidating fashionable artist. Unlike so many artists (and writers, admittedly) she adopts no pose. She just loves making art, and it shows in her work. Despite the lackadaisical attitude though, she is a real master of craft. That willingness to marry imagery that could be deemed silly with real technique makes for a unique viewing experience. “I just make the art, I let you guys come up with your own ideas about it,” she says.