

“Far From the Tree”: Judy Ledgerwood at Rhona Hoffman Gallery

by Phillip Barcio

Judy Ledgerwood’s “Far From the Tree” exhibit at Rhona Hoffman’s new gallery space affirms the power of paint. The eight works in the show tremble with expressionistic abandon and proclaim the artist’s love for the medium.

The iconic *Yoni* (2018) radiates with elemental pride—thick squirts of raw paint coming straight from the tubes; a mesh of intuitive brush strokes supporting the oozing, linear mounds; an avalanche of primordial drips advancing downward, acquiescing to gravity’s incessant and inevitable lure. Ledgerwood’s hand, arm, body and mind are all represented here, with corporeal authority.



Judy Ledgerwood, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 2018. Oil and metallic oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

Sunshine and Shadow (2018) drew me in yet denied my eye a place to land: there was too much to look at. Relaxing my gaze, I see everything more clearly. (I see) shapes and color relationships; an array of ogees that echo 9th century Tunisian wall tiles; the interlacing patterns of an Incan textile. All of this and none of this is there. This painting inspired me to see what was in front of me and what was lurking within me.



Judy Ledgerwood, *Tiny Dancer*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

Tiny Dancer (2017) welcomes viewers to the visceral pleasure of texture and hue. It calmed my eyes with its harmonious triangles. That relaxed state continued as I gazed into *Sheela* (2018), a mix of geometric shapes and symbolic, concentric yonis. These paintings point me towards an examination of paint as a medium, paint as an action, and paint as a meta-rhetorical tool.

Two large-scale vertical canvases—*Drunkards Path* (2018) and *Hopscotch Chelsea Rose* (2018)—which hang side by side in the exhibition, act as Yin Yang complements to each other. *Drunkard’s Path* is a statement of surrender; a loss of control; a descent into madness that nonetheless conveys its own sort of undeniable balance. *Hopscotch Chelsea Rose* is a

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In *Sandy*, a bold green dash crosses over the bottom of a pair of gray lips. The green is a crossing-out and a second mouth.

These are not passive portraits. The overlay of mouths describe active voices while the eyes demand our attention.

Sandy is a compelling example of the paintings' examination of the relationship between head and environment. Sandy's hair mimics the waves of the suggested seascape behind them. The hair becomes blue at its border with the blue sea and blue continues to take over the hair, replacing brunette waves with water.

The hair turns into background and vice versa, concretizing the interdependence of self. Is the head's reflection of the surrounding, external world creating its environment, or is the environment infesting the head?

In *Effe and Ida*, the hair is illuminated on the right side by a light source outside of the painting's frame. Besides the characters' outward stares, this is the only clear gesture toward a world outside of the painted space. The illumination, outside of view, can offer a reminder of our own projections into the space of the painting.

What is the self beyond our reflections of those things which are projected onto us? Bergman's artworks embody selves which absorb their environment while remaining defiantly distinct and staring back. ■

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statement of planning and repetition; an expression of the power of patterns; an embrace of stability, calmness, and security. The value of both extremes is validated by the contrasts between the two works.

The largest painting in the show was the monumental *Grandma's Flower Garden* (2006). This painting felt like the intellectual and aesthetic primordial spring from which the rest of her work evolved. It assured me that whether I follow the track of abstraction, reading only the rich, formalist bounty of these works, or choose instead to explore their innumerable, symbolic narrative mysteries within the compositions, either way, I will arrive at the same place: a world of relationships, processes, and patterns.

Thinking back on this exhibition, I am reminded of the landmark essay, "Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture" (1977-78), by Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff. Judy Ledgerwood is the contemporary heir to its revolutionary wisdom. The works in "Far From the Tree" declare with expressionistic authority the truth revealed by the Pattern and Decoration movement of the last generation but smack down its pedantic cobwebs, making way for fresh, electric, painterly joy. ■

Judy Ledgerwood's "Far From the Tree" is on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, 1711 West Chicago Avenue, through May 19, 2018.



Judy Ledgerwood, *Hopscotch Chelsea Rose*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 76 x 46 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

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