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The New York Times

Review: Rosy Keyser, ‘The Hell Bitch’



Rosy Keyser’s “Terrestrial Mime” (2015) reflects her more primal precedents. Credit...Courtesy of the artist and Maccarone, New York

By **Roberta Smith**

May 14, 2015

ROSY KEYSER

‘The Hell Bitch’

Maccarone

630 Greenwich Street, at Morton Street, West Village

Through June 6

The feisty assemblage of paintings in Rosy Keyser's sixth gallery show in New York veers between extremes of messiness and order. When weaker, as in "Early Magic" and "Late Magic," the pieces achieve little more than a late Abstract Expressionist incoherence. Somewhat stronger works are starkly neat. "Between the Hips" and "Between the Knees," more wall reliefs than paintings, consist of rectangles with an internal shape or two — all made from white powder-coated steel with sandbags and other found objects hanging from them.

Ms. Keyser's best efforts fall somewhere in the middle of these bookends of tired convention and Dadaist obviousness, and are messy in a way that is genuinely disconcerting. In them, patchworks of canvas are affixed to exposed wood stretchers and both are subjected to wild brushwork. In addition, canvas is unraveled into immense manelike fringes of thread that also suggest distended paintbrushes. These fringes may hang free or be worked back into the surface with paint serving as glue.

Works made in this way, like "Terrestrial Mime" and "Music for a Drowned World," have a violent, entropic energy; they result from rather than depict a degree of tumult that seems appropriate to the time. They reflect Ms. Keyser harking back to more primal precedents, including the burned, punctured or sewn-burlap paintings of Pol Bury, while giving new life to the 1950s concept of action painting. She may also be taking a few tips from the paintings of contemporaries like Anna Betbeze and Lucy Dodd, which is to her credit. As seen here, her best new paintings are less one-note than many of their predecessors, striking chords delicate and heavy simultaneously. They declare a fullness of promise at which her previous shows have only hinted. **ROBERTA SMITH**