

ARTFORUM

Critics' Picks



Sandra Meigs, *Old Lady and Murder. The Little Lost Operas*, 2020, acrylic on panel, silver leaf, paper, polymer clay, fabric, wood, 20 x 24".

Sandra Meigs

Susan Hobbs Gallery
137 Tecumseth Street
March 13–July 25, 2020

Strange, crafty characters lend literal and emotional depth to Sandra Meigs's works in "The Little Lost Operas," which brings together the artist's small compositions referencing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century operas. Loosely painted backdrops draped with fabric curtains set the stage for hand-size puppets (all components include found materials). Some of these assemblages measure just a few inches across; another incorporates a standard side table. Surprisingly, the improvisational pieces emotively outpace their modest means, conveying joy, desire, sorrow, and fear. Together, they charge the gallery with the verve that anticipates a curtain call. (Upstairs, six abstract oil paintings of brightly colored swirls provide a welcome respite from the eccentricity on view below, but it is unclear how the two series connect conceptually.)

The exhibition's crescendo might be *Old Lady and Murder. The Little Lost Operas* (all works 2020). Framed by the sleeves of a satin shirt, under which prying angels float in the painted space's rafters, the crime scene is punctuated by a gray-haired puppet posed with her arms raised and mouth agape. From the darkly toned background emerge two slight figures: the victim and the perpetrator. This work registers differently than the rest because the protagonist appears desperate to break the fourth wall, implicating the viewer in the drama.

Written descriptions conjure orchestral accompaniments for these seductively peculiar scenes and build on the lyricism of the silent figures' expressive faces and postures. One text reads, "The strings and winds play incredibly sharp staccatos." The exhibition's negotiations of sound are suggestive in other ways as well. Classical opera has historically been a social affair; theater balconies are designed to facilitate sightlines to the audience as much as to the stage. With this and the current Covid-19 crisis in mind, it is difficult not to lament the pleasures of looking and listening together, off-line.

— Noa Bronstein