

# ARTFORUM

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## Brussels Reviews

### “Painting After Postmodernism: Belgium–USA”

VANDEBORGHT/CINÉMA GALERIES | THE UNDERGROUND



**Melissa Kretschmer, *Green Sleeve*, 2016**, vellum, gesso, gouache, beeswax, plywood, 84 × 27 × 2". From "Painting After Postmodernism: Belgium–USA."

“Painting After Postmodernism: Belgium–USA” was a refreshing antidote to the hustle and bustle of the current art scene; none of the eight Americans and eight Belgians in the show, curated by art historian and critic

Barbara Rose, was among the usual suspects. More than 250 paintings were installed at two locations. Most were on display at the Vanderborcht, a six-story International Style building from the 1930s. Natural light from a glass-enclosed atrium in the center of the former department store enhanced the pleasure of viewing art that was often colorful, with textured surfaces and bold, emphatic shapes.

In effect, the exhibition comprised sixteen solo shows, allowing visitors to encounter these artists' oeuvres in depth and across a range of time. Adding to the sense of discovery, the artists all express themselves in what's become an exotic artistic idiom, one that is decidedly visual rather than verbal. Many of the works were so large that few galleries (let alone the art fairs that have become so inordinately important lately) could have accommodated them. If you stood far back from many of the paintings to grasp their overall configurations, you couldn't savor myriad details. If you walked close to their surfaces, you practically forgot the parts you'd just been savoring.

The seventeen paintings by Larry Poons installed across the entire ground floor of the Vanderborcht (there were four more at Cinéma Galeries | The Underground) felt like epic, nonrepresentational, Technicolor narratives comprised of flickering strokes of, say, violet, mauve, chartreuse, and rose. Bernard Gilbert's *Number 252*, 2016, clocking in at almost thirty-five feet in length, resembled a gigantic three-dimensional scroll. And as you walked by Karen Gunderson's linen surfaces covered with black oil paint, passages that seemed as if they might have been carved were animated by light streaming down on them from overhead, evoking dark waves in motion. Representational images that verged on abstraction and abstract images that verged on the representational by Paul Manes, who is based in Colorado, were in a state of constant flux as well.

Among the Belgians, Xavier Noiret-Thomé was engaged with both inner and outer space. One group of his paintings, with thick collage and mixed-media elements attached to flat planes, dramatically emphasized the push and pull of his squares and rectangles. Noiret-Thomé's other canvases, covered with tiny reflective dots and circles, suggested the sort of deep spaces associated with celestial skies. Joris Ghekiere, who is Flemish, engaged with the principal themes of the exhibition: texture, shape, and color. With his untitled canvases from 2012–16, he conveyed a variety of intriguing spatial concerns.

Melissa Kretschmer, it seemed, had it all: engaging color stripes; surfaces she shaped with power tools; and panels, vertical and horizontal, in a range of sizes. She stole the show. Years ago, her works might have been called specific objects. These days, they are simply good, solid paintings inventively composed from vellum, gesso, gouache, beeswax, and plywood.

As for Rose, this large, rambling survey belongs among her lasting achievements. These include not only other exhibitions but her landmark texts from the 1960s and later, such as "ABC Art," published in *Art in America* in 1965, her *Vogue* articles, *Artforum* reviews, *New York* magazine columns, and innumerable books and catalogues. With this show, Rose bucked fashion and called attention to a group of highly individual artists who merit more attention.

—Phyllis Tuchman