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“Pick of the Week: Judith Linhares”

by Annabel Osberg

ARTILLERY

Via her expressionistic brush, Judith Linhares teases latent absurdity and uncanniness from hackneyed pictorial genres. Female nudes, sublime landscapes, exotic animals and floral still lifes are jumbled and transposed into worlds of outré wildness. The Pasadena-born, New York-based artist is best known for figure paintings that have influenced younger notables; but the newest works in Linhares’ current show at Various Small Fires evince that she depicts inanimate objects and animated creatures with equal aplomb. It’s hard to imagine a humble plate of corn on the cob painted with as much frenetic pizzazz as *Stack* (2017). Nor is it easy to remember a bottle of liquid dish detergent ever looking so creepily silly as *Joy* (2017), whose banality belies its superficial titular assertion of happiness. In her figure paintings, Linhares honors the timeworn tradition of portraying au naturel women in nature. But her frolicking female protagonists appear as though enjoying themselves considerably more than the confrontational girls of Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), or the stultified lady in Manet’s *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863). Instead of posing, Linhares’ impish women picnic, recline, climb trees, dig, roll logs, and play with tigers inside alien dreamscapes that they seem to have commandeered. In *Cove* (2010, pictured above), fruits parade as planets while a tablecloth mysteriously enshrouds a lurking figure that evokes a foreboding mood enhanced by Linhares’ expressionism and her rakish subjects’ brooding expressions. These sportive dames appear cognizant of their expropriated liberty’s precariousness.



Judith Linhares, *Cove*, 2010 (Image courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires, Los Angeles)