

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Karen Lederer: I'll Be Your Mirror

11/16/19 – 1/11/20

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce I'll Be Your Mirror, Karen Lederer's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The show will run from November 16, 2019 through January 11, 2020. A **conversation with the artist will occur on Saturday, November 16 at 4 pm, with a reception following until 7 pm.** Please note that the gallery will be **closed November 27 – 30 and December 25 – January 4** for holiday breaks.

I'll Be Your Mirror continues Lederer's exploration of the legacy of Modernist painting in our digital present and represents a significant expansion of its formal vocabulary, styles of mark making, and art historical references. The printed gradients and bold colors of her prior works persist, but now are joined by moments of delicate, fluid, painterly brush strokes. The deceptive picture planes of Matisse and Picasso also remain, yet many paintings embrace a realistic, three-dimensional perspective. Not content to merely riff on or pay homage to these forerunners, Lederer gathers them together in a critical embrace, resulting in paintings whose accessibility and initial cheerfulness yield to an ambiguous rumination on living, making, and loving in a moment of political upheaval and social transformation.

As in her first exhibition at the gallery, a number of paintings in I'll Be Your Mirror portray ceramics based on works by Picasso, though the faces of the owls and people on these vases and bowls are cryptic, perhaps even concerned, and some are circled by bees. Their combination of cheer and subdued disquiet takes another form in *Life with Picasso*, in which a bottle of Campari, a glass, a plate of watermelon, and a copy of Françoise Gilot's memoir of her years as Picasso's mistress rest on a patterned and striped tablecloth. Gilot was more than Picasso's mistress, of course; an artist in her own right, Picasso actively damaged her career after they separated, at which point she continued to work as an artist and critic nonetheless. It's clear in view of the number of her paintings referencing his work that Lederer admires Picasso the artist, but *Life with Picasso* acknowledges the complicated nature of this admiration in view of Picasso the man. Matisse also returns in I'll Be Your Mirror. In *Ali*, a young woman in an exquisitely painted blouse sporting an "I Voted!" sticker sits below a poster of Matisse's *The Thousand and One Nights*. Matisse's work is mostly out of frame, but the text at its upper right describes the moments in its titular story when Scheherazade falls silent mid-tale to induce the king to let her live for another night and finish it (they later marry). Creativity, survival, democracy, the responsibilities of citizenship—all are present in Lederer's paintings if you know where and how to look.

This is, perhaps, to say that Lederer's still lifes, portraits, and domestic scenes are not merely *domestic*. (Why, when a woman paints her circle and her home is the work often called domestic or "diaristic" when the same work by a man wouldn't be?) Though unpretentious, they are formally complicated, sophisticated depictions of one young

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artist dealing with the weight of art history as she seeks to make a home in a world that as a general matter is hostile, and that Lederer knows such pictures need not be self-serious or glum is one aspect of her talent. It also aligns her with another forebear in I'll Be Your Mirror, Mary Cassatt, two of whose prints (*The Coiffure* and *La Toilette*) are referenced in two of Lederer's paintings. In *The Coiffure* and *La Toilette*, the women pictured do their hair and wash their faces respectively, both in front of mirrors. These images are both the most literal manifestation of I'll Be Your Mirror's title but also introduce a theme of doubling that unites many of its paintings to varying degrees. They also introduce the notion of self-care, which despite its polluted use in contemporary discourse can be, as Foucault reminds us, an ethical and creative imperative.

In *Eli*, the artist's husband holds a bouquet of flowers in front of a tangle of branches, both rendered with punchy, graphic flatness. In *October*, he reclines on a couch covered with a multi-colored toile upholstered couch featuring flowers painted in a style recalling Les Nabis and reads a copy of China Miéville's book on the Russian revolution. If the Eli of *Eli* faces the artist (and by extension us, the public) in *October* he has turned away, but in that private moment is nonetheless also opening himself up to history, to the political. Flowers bloom in many ways in I'll Be Your Mirror, and their beauty is more pronounced by virtue of being moments of ordered delight in a complicated world. The interplay of self and other, interior and exterior, intimacy and politics—this is the real subject of Lederer's paintings.

Karen Lederer received a BFA in Printmaking and Drawing from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2008, and an MFA in Printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, in 2012. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Her first solo exhibition at Grant Wahlquist Gallery was reviewed in *Art New England*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Portland Press Herald*. She has also had solo exhibitions at Tennis Elbow at the Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, and Field Projects, New York, amongst others. Her work has been presented in group exhibitions at venues including: Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York; Danese/Corey, New York; Ortega Y Gasset Projects, Brooklyn; Bravin Lee, New York; Equity Gallery, New York; the Lower East Side Printshop, New York; and Anya Tish Gallery, Houston. Lederer has received fellowships, awards, and residencies from the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, New York; the Lowest East Printshop; the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Program; and New American Paintings.

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.