

ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

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PREVIEW: *Maine*

KAREN LEDERER: CHEETO FISH

Grant Wahlquist Gallery • Portland, ME • grantwahlquist.com • Through September 22, 2017

To be unabashedly whimsical in one's art, it could be argued, is as daring as being consciously provocative. Karen Lederer, a New York-based painter who earned an MFA in printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2012, embraces the light side, yet in a smart and compelling fashion that relies on various appropriations. The 18 pieces in her show, made between 2014 and this year, use combinations of colored pencil, watercolor, acrylic, oil and markers on panel; there are also five oil and watercolor monoprints.

In several pieces Lederer incorporates references to Picasso and Matisse to a witty turn. *Staring Contest*, 2017, features a black-and-white Picasso owl (based on one of his ceramic sculptures) gazing at a fish bowl that recalls Matisse's *The Goldfish* from 1912. A similar art-historical send-up appears in *Sylvettes and the Fish*, 2015, where several Picasso images of one of his muses, Sylvette, regard another colorful Matissean fish bowl. It's like showdown at the

modern art corral.

Lederer's art-historical references include the famous blue hippo, aka "William," from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Matisse's *The Dance* (on a coffee mug); and small strips of what appear to be Roy Lichtenstein Ben-Day Dots. Add some

colorful tongue depressors, many tropical fish, and what appear to be jelly beans, and you have a kind of latter-day Pop Art fantasy.

Then there are the bright orange Cheetos, that snack that has come back into vogue, if you will, by way of its association with the current U.S. president. In *Sunset*, 2015, an overflowing blue and white enamelware bowl of the cheese puffs shares a table with a can of La Croix sparkling water. This product placement



Karen Lederer, *Staring Contest*, 2017, colored pencil, watercolor, oil and acrylic paint on panel, 40 x 30".
Photo: Forest Kelley.

is not all tongue-in-cheek or snarky; the patterns and color scheme are striking in their visual dynamic.

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is a welcome addition to an already vibrant Portland art scene (according to a new Americans for the Arts report, arts and cultural organizations had an economic impact on the city of more than \$75 million in 2015). Representing the likes of sculptor Diana Cherbuliez and collagist Nyeema Morgan, the gallery is expanding the offerings well beyond the traditions of Maine art. It's a pleasing development.

—Carl Little