

571 Projects

The First Three Years

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Melora Griffis

wings and murmurs

Drawing on the visual traditions of German Expressionist painters including Otto Dix and George Grosz, Griffis paints with a vivid and unusual palette. This body of work comprises figurative and abstract paintings on canvas and on paper in which she explores the representational qualities of abstraction and the non-objective qualities of figuration. In *Bruised Kite Hope Flares* (2010, acrylic, pastel and graphite on paper, 40" x 26") glimpses of forms and colors peek through layers of white paint as though through a tear in a curtain, hinting at things forgotten or repressed. *Unsichtbar* (2011, oil on linen, 46" x 30") shows a seated woman, hands folded in her lap. The figure is anonymous, her head painted over in white and her identity lost. Griffis' work is emotionally unguarded, tapping into underlying psychological states. Her paintings are high stakes and aesthetically dramatic pieces of fragmented narratives depicted in loose and masterly brushstrokes.

A native New Yorker, Griffis received her BFA from The Rhode Island School of Design and participated in the Mentor Program at Santa Monica College of Design, Art, and Architecture. She has had solo exhibitions at the Pamela Williams Gallery (Amagansett, NY), Lizan Tops Gallery and AE Gallery (both East Hampton, NY), Whitney Art Works (Greenport, NY), The Boylan Gallery (Rhinebeck, NY), and Blue Heron Arts Center (New York, NY). Her work has been included in group shows at The Waterfront Museum (Brooklyn, NY),



in her own words_

My work summons the echoes and voices that I believe have been paralyzed to silence and subjected to altercation in a conditioned society. I use figures in my work that have an ephemeral quality, floating, or only partially visible, that articulate a presence of a transcendent yet dependent spirit. I often work with the psychological material inherent in societies influence on women today and historically. The role of wife, mother or nurturer of the planet, the pressures to look, behave, and live in a certain way, and the guidance little girls are, or are not, granted as they become women, are all arenas of focus.

I bring a sense of play when depicting universal stories, but there is also a tenor of darkness as I express complicated unconscious messages. I use the ordinary, a house interior, the family portrait, and objects in nature to re-examine a relationship to the familiar and the atmosphere we have grown up in. My work provokes a curiosity in the viewer to question the scene, story, character, relationship, object, or space from a revived perspective. I tap into dreams, buried emotions, fantasy, sexuality, and habitual beliefs around these themes. My work awakens the irony and verity of what lives beneath the surface with humor and juxtaposed imagery.

I have a painterly approach to representation, incorporating abstract elements, celebrating chaos, and color. A strong narrative exists in my work and the loose applications of paint, vigorous attention to drawing, and deliberate placement of forms and shapes on canvas, paper, or panel, are essential in creating a dramatic statement. I work intuitively, leaning toward an organic mark, celebrating a textured, uneven, layered surface where serendipitous action transpires.



Titled “*wings and murmurs*,” this show of Melora Griffis’s haunting paintings, ranging from postcard-size to more than five feet tall, was devoted mainly to portraits, with abstract elements frequently encroaching on the canvases. An effective example here of the artist’s experimental figuration was an oil-on-linen work titled *unsichtbar* (2011). The large painting depicts a presumable young women in a white dress seated with arms folded in her lap and Mary Jane-clad feet crossed demurely at the ankles. An empty white expanse obliterates her face, as if the beholder’s recollection is foggy and the sitter’s identity - or imagined character - can’t be recalled. Most intriguingly, the figure appears at once to be emerging and disappearing.

In acrylic, gouache, and pastel on paper, *empty room* (2010) illustrates a space crowded with seats, corner of the room, and even the legs of a solitary male figure in a military uniform have been obscured by horizontal brushstrokes in opaque whites. Here Griffis seems to be addressing erasure as a painterly action, and in terms of any implied narrative, the results are as austere as they are fertile.

Griffis’s professed influences, such as George Grosz and Otto Dix, were much in evidence and some of the artist’s emotional portraits could well be compared with those of contemporaries Chantal Joffe and Tabboo! With their blurred edges and dramatic use of color, Griffis’s work conveyed the impression that memories and retellings can be strangely cloaked and yet, nevertheless, poignant.

By Doug McClemon
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Melora Griffis
bruised kite hope flares
2010
acrylic, pastel and graphite on paper
40 x 26 in.



Melora Griffis
Envy's Daughter
2008
oil on canvas
36 x 24 in.



Melora Griffis
Sister
2008
oil on canvas
33 x 21.5 in.

