

The East Hampton Star

Women at Marders -By Jennifer Landes

(November 11, 2010) Simone de Beauvoir said that one is not born a woman, one becomes one. The work in Silas Marder's "Women" exhibit reflects both views, ranging from the essentialist to the evolutionary.

There are three examples from Kiki Smith's "Spinster Series." A group of Iris prints made by scanning a drawing, reversing it to its negative image, and double printing it on an Iris printer. The results are primitive and a bit spooky, using a fairy tale to hint at vulnerability and exposure.

The spinning wheel functions as a symbol of women's work and even enslavement to craft. It is also the vessel of Sleeping Beauty's undoing. Like most of Ms. Smith's work, the prints are beautiful in spite of their veiled or apparent brutality to the frailty of the human form.

When she incorporates the subject's hair as part of the spinning process in the drawing, the meaning shifts a bit. The girl contributes to her own creation and seemingly gains power over her form and how it is perceived. It's an intriguing mixed message, inconsistent perhaps, but hopeful.

For a show titled "Women," there are not many other examples of the female form, or any kind of figures, for that matter.

Heather Goodchild's felt masterpieces balance pattern, expert knife skills, and adept portraiture to present a folksy but sophisticated grouping of female busts looking as regal and powerful as the males that are typically depicted in this manner. A full-size bust portrait of Helen Stapleton Brown is as delicate and precise in its assemblage of tesseraes as the subject is fine-boned and determined in her expression.

There is a sense of knowing these women, or at least of having

seen them before, but their blend of modernity and nostalgia is dislocating and mysterious. The purpose behind their willful demeanors is unknown, evoking ideas of temperance, suffrage, and abolition. In her patchwork quilt of faces of designs, she spells out a message, “The Balanced Life Will Flourish,” that is somewhat clarifying but still unknowable, like an unfamiliar classical myth.



Heather Goodchild's portrait of "Helen Stapleton Brown"

Corinne von Lebusa's drawings often look like old Expressionist wood cuts and have a Symbolist kind of eeriness or otherworldliness. The subject of "The Moth" is clearly a woman with a well-defined body, but her skirt looks organic and suggests some type of mutation, like a retelling of an Apollo and Daphne myth. When the artist's other pictures are taken into account, it isn't difficult to imagine that these women — about to be (or already) sawed in two, possibly drugged and ravaged, or about to catch a

couple in flagrante — might prefer turning into a tree to these violations and betrayals.

Aurora Robson's super pretty panels mix acrylic and mica powder in bubblegum pinks, sparkly roses, lavenders, and mauves. The designs are abstract and atmospheric. They seem like a possible world of feminine beauty taking form in a grand gesture of conception. It would be wonderful to see what is left when the smoke clears.

Sally Egbert contributes four colorful and abstracted collages of flowers or floral motifs, each one bringing forth a different mood, but all very innocently hopeful even when they appear dark. A huge Connie Fox acrylic painting on canvas takes over the back wall of the gallery.

In the back video gallery, a clip of Janis Ian singing "At Seventeen" on "Saturday Night Live" is an oddly compelling 1970s flashback. I dimly remember my mother wearing a similar white, wide-lapelled maxi skirt suit to some dress-up function. A mixture of attractive and plain, Ms. Ian was well suited to delivering lines about ugly ducklings sitting alone in rooms and having to conjure imaginary boyfriends in high school. When I first heard the song as a child, I thought the message was that girls like that would grow up to be pretty and then would be happy. Sitting in the gallery many decades later, however, experience and hard-gained wisdom brought me a different and richer lesson.

A portion of the sales from the show will benefit the Ellen Hermanson Breast Center at Southampton Hospital. The exhibit will be on view through Nov. 21.

<http://www.easthamptonstar.com/dnn/Arts/WomenatMarders/tabid/13624/Default.aspx>