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JULY 2017 - "THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Foofaraw & Spleen Mingle in The Lodge Gallery's New Show

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Heather Morgan, Don't Change, 2017, Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in

"Foofaraw & Spleen"

The Lodge Gallery (<https://www.thelodgegallery.com>)

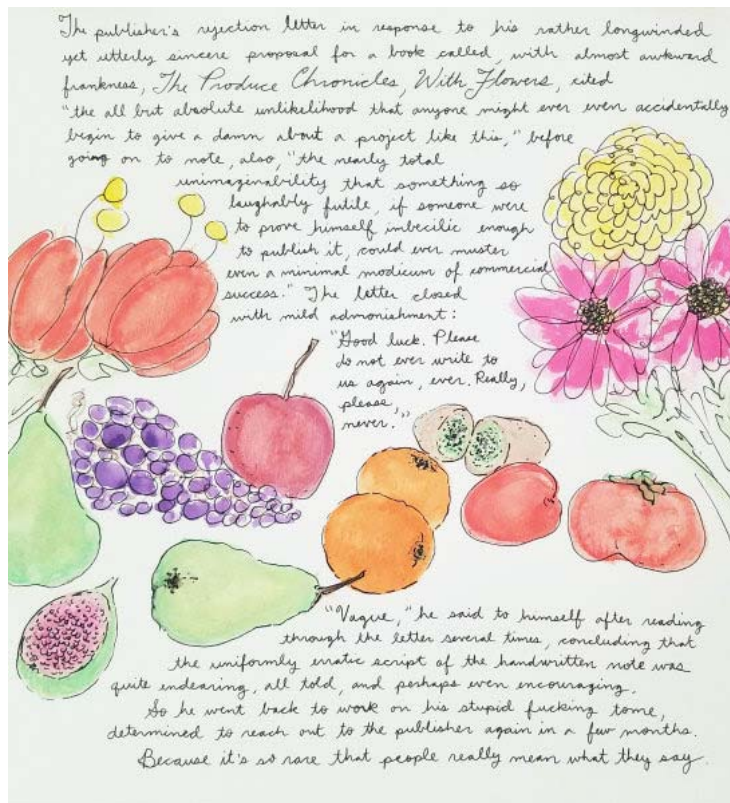
131 Chrystie Street, New York

May 10th - June 11th, 2017

By **JILL CONNER**, JUN. 2017

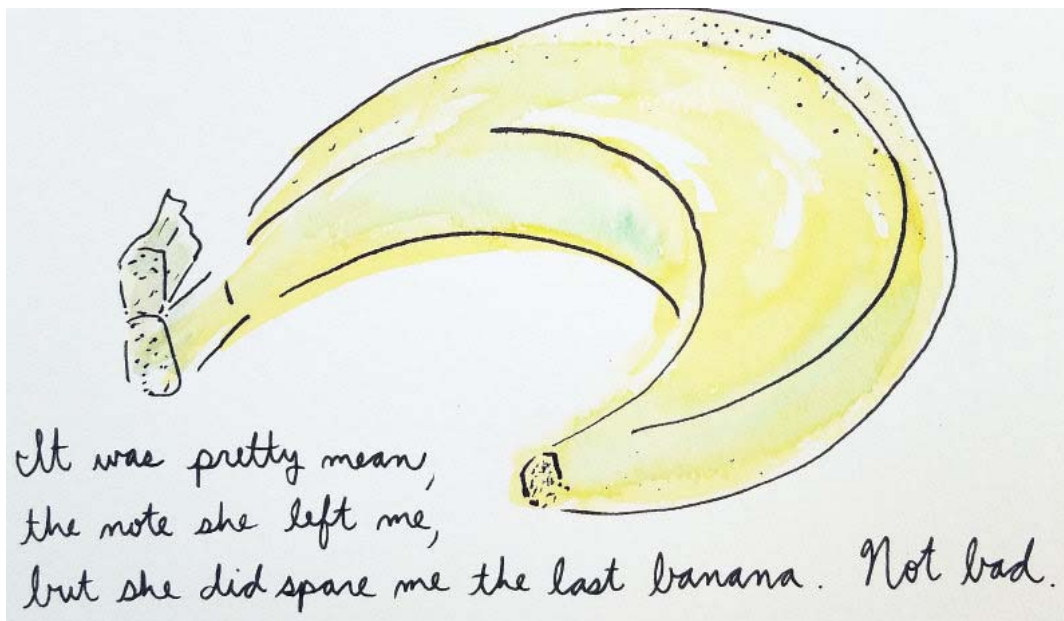
Poetry, prose and portraits surface and mingle at the Lodge Gallery in a two-person show titled "Foofaraw & Spleen," where a presentation of small, still-life watercolor paintings by Paul D'Agostino appear next to larger oil paintings by Heather Morgan. This selection of opposites actually blends well together. For the first time, Morgan presents a selection of portraits made with black and white paint. The blur seen between both colors renders a light purple hue that bridges with D'Agostino's delicate representation of fruit and flowers. As indicated by the exhibition's title, The Lodge Gallery presents the toned-down spirit of punk decadence along with briefly written, heartfelt observations.

“Foofaraw & Spleen” opens with an untitled piece by D’Agostino that reads, “The publisher’s rejection letter in response to his rather longwinded yet utterly sincere proposal for a book called, with almost awkward frankness, *The Produce Chronicles, With Flowers*, cited ‘the all but absolute unlikelihood that anyone might ever ever accidentally begin to give a damn about a project like this,’ before going on to note, also, ‘the nearly total unimaginability that something so laughably futile, if someone were to prove himself imbecilic enough to publish it, could ever muster a minimal modicum of commercial success.’ The letter closed with mild admonishment: ‘Good luck. Please do not ever write to us again, ever. Really, please, never.’” The dark aura emerging from this criticism that appears across an 11-by-10 inch piece of paper is softened by a colorful array of flowers, fruit and vegetables that reach across the page in a cone-shaped cornucopia.



Paul D'Agostino, *The Publisher's Rejection Letter*, 2014 - ongoing, Ink and watercolor on paper 11 x 10 inches

The text at the end of D’Agostino’s composition reads, “‘Vague,’ he said to himself after reading through the letter several times, concluding that the uniformly erratic script of the handwritten note was quite endearing, all told, and perhaps even encouraging. So he went back to work on his stupid fucking tome, determined to reach out to the publisher again in a few months. Because it’s so rare that people really mean what they say.” This blur between determination, emotion and repudiation sets the tone that continues throughout Heather Morgan’s portraits of particular individuals whose works have inspired her own art over the years.



Paul D'Agostino, The Note She Left, 2014 - ongoing, Ink and watercolor on paper, 4 x 7.50 in



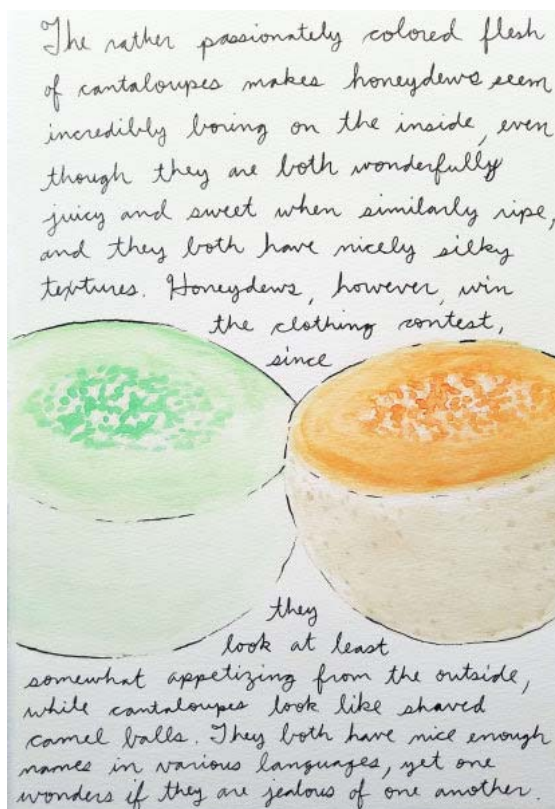
Heather Morgan, Make Life Beautiful, 2017, 20 x 16 inches, oil on canvas

As seen in “Reich der Traueme” (2017) and “Bird Without Song” (2017) Morgan’s subjects are both dead and alive, showing both Nico and Sinead O’Conner in discreet, humbling contexts. Gallerist Keith Schweitzer described Morgan’s new paintings as an experiment since she was stepping away from her vibrant color palette to a far more subdued gray-scale. The resulting expressiveness shows Morgan’s well-known subjects like Morrissey, Michael Hutchence, Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Brett Anderson and Antonin Artaud as almost unrecognizable as they twist, turn and reach out beneath the artist’s modelled light.



Heather Morgan, *The Dandy*, 2017, 20 x 16 inches, oil on canvas

Paul D'Agostino's watercolors punctuate Morgan's painted memorials while his sometime cynical writing connects to the dark ambiguity that appears throughout Morgan's oil painted line. For instance a 7-by-4 inch watercolor of a yellow banana appears as a miniature right next to "Reich der Traueme" with text, "Sometimes it's hard to wait, but it will be so much better tomorrow. Maybe even perfect." This sense of longing continues in another watercolor of two white dandelions above "Don't Change" the portrait of Michael Hutchence. D'Agostino's complimentary text reads, "Wishes in wait. Never to be granted. Never, even, to be made. Fucking sad bro." In each painting, the handwritten cursive texts break away from the idyll of his floral and fauna representations and, instead, reveal sharp juxtapositions experienced throughout daily life.



Paul D'Agostino, The Clothing Contest, 2014, Ink and watercolor on paper, 8 x 5.50 in

Toward the back of the gallery, the small-scale watercolors appear in groups showing a cluster of ideas as one set of thoughts that link together through naturalistic still-life representations. Although they were made in 2014, D'Agostino had never exhibited these works until now even though his light, colorful paintings serve as the perfect complement to Morgan's new series of oil paintings. The mystique generated by her impasto, that moves between black and white, are echoed by D'Agostino's poetic and somewhat incomplete-sounding literary thoughts. Together the paintings throughout "Foofaraw & Spleen" configure a particular atmosphere that hovers around hope and despair - the very paradox of desire that makes one want to see even newer paintings by these two artists very soon, again. **WM**



JILL CONNER

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