

Art City: Jeanette Mundt's 'Beggars Thieves Faeries and Whores'

Rafael Francisco Salas, Special to the Journal Sentinel *November 16, 2016*



*"The Color of the Sky Helping the Devil" (2016)
 by Jeanette Mundt. (Photo: Green Gallery East)*

Jeanette Mundt is a Brooklyn-based painter whose work is so of-the-moment it might remind you of the social media you were browsing over breakfast this very morning. The scary clown epidemic, the current state of the Amanda Knox scandal and a leaked nude selfie were all elements in her recent show at [Green Gallery East](#).

Mundt mines the bitter and sweet moments of cultural ephemera in her paintings and mixed media imagery. Included is biting commentary of how we see, what we look at, and how it affects us.

The gallery's web announcement for her now-closed exhibit, "Beggars Thieves Faeries and Whores," includes photographs of the aforementioned Amanda Knox kissing her Italian boyfriend. The images are captured from the documentary about Knox recently released on Netflix. Mundt slyly captivates us with the recognizable drama, but asks us who the beggars and thieves are. Ourselves as consumers? Perhaps.

An image that Mundt repeats within the show is a painting of the 432 Park Avenue building in Manhattan. This ultra-thin, ultra-rich residential high rise seems for Mundt to be a cipher for contemporary culture, monumentally meaningful. One of the paintings is called "The Color of the Sky Helping the Devil," and indeed the sky around the building is awash in a playful layer of glitter. The juxtaposition of Mundt's offhand painting style and her choice of subject matter begs a criticism of our contemporary desires.

At times Mundt seems to be defying the conventional goals of painting altogether. Highlighted in the back gallery is a small canvas painted in a lurid yellow undertone. A nude figure is outlined in black, with red dashes gesturing towards tattoos imprinted on the flesh. The white flash of a camera blinds us and obscures the top of the painting. It is a nude selfie of the artist. The tradition of the female nude in art is brought into a contemporary reading. Is the painted photo a celebration of the self or a reflection on the male gaze in art history? Perhaps Mundt is commenting on hacked selfies or the impersonal culture of sexting?

As Mundt's paintings reveal, the answer seems to hang ambiguously between how we consume imagery in the everyday world contrasted with the sacred notions we give to painting and other art objects.

Other figurative works in the show include a series of paintings of Christian Bale in his seminal role as Patrick Bateman in the film "American Psycho," as well as a mysterious hermaphroditic figure. These paintings, along with Mundt's self-portrait, round out an examination of the body, gender roles and how we are assaulted with them throughout our mediated lives.

Bale, lunging in his underwear and wearing a cosmetic mask, discusses a beauty regimen of ablutions and creams that parallel the inordinate amount of sit-ups he does to maintain a youthful frame. The character of Bateman is a Wall Street shark, and we later learn he is also a serial killer, a beauty-obsessed archetype of male vanity and power. The titles of the paintings echo quotes by Bateman in the movie, such as "Be Thinner, Look Better."



*"Be Thinner, Look Better" (2016) by Jeanette Mundt.
 (Photo: Green Gallery East)*

Other works in the show feature a scene of the dramatic capture of El Chapo in his compound in Mexico and a big, buttery painting of a lobster dinner exuding a sense of greasy excess in red and yellow. Tying the room together is a cowhide rug on the floor with pink flamingos painted on it entitled "Pink Flamingos Always Fascinated Me." For my part, I was fascinated, confused, at times a little bored, but always ready to swipe right to the next image. Mundt's exhibit sees the world in the same glittery, momentary and erratic way to which our contemporary eyes are becoming accustomed.

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