

The Woman in The Painting Has Left

The female body as portrayed in the work of Meg Lipke is visible only through absence. The title of her show—*The Woman in The Painting Has Left*—refers to a shift in her methods away from paintings on stretchers to paintings that have been cut, sewn and stuffed in order to have “body.” These “bodies” hang on the wall or slump onto the floor; they have been released from the stretcher and now occupy their own autonomous place.

The Woman in The Painting Has Left realizes a dialectic between divergent traditions. Works more conventionally situated on a stretcher, like *Knowing the Truth and Living It*, dramatically foreground a pictorial space where the intimation of figures becomes a proxy onto which viewers can project their own subjectivity. By contrast, a work like *Sisters* is a painted sculpture where limbs composed of varying materials drape between upright, freestanding “bodies.” Modeled after Frida Kahlo’s *The Two Fridas*, this painting offers a collapsed aesthetic that mirrors the lack of agency many—people of all genders, assigned or preferred—feel in the face of a patriarchal system that must be dismantled.

Alluding to seminal feminist sculptors—such as Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse—Lipke’s current body of work also nods to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1892 story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which narrates a woman breaking free from the confines of a room where she is both convalescing and imprisoned. Pushing the discussion of painting away from preoccupations regarding whether a painting’s imagery or surface is well-designed or collectible, one could say *The Woman in The Painting Has*

Left out of sheer disgust. Unseen and unheard, she bursts from the confines of the frame and becomes a maker.

Which leads us back to absence. Lipke is making paintings “with bodies,” placing them alongside more traditional canvases that lack body. Abandoning the use of a stretcher is essential to this. In relation to bodies, “stretchers” typically suggest disease or illness. A painting situated on a stretcher, then, as well as the woman who occupies the painting as its content, is in a weakened state. Both lack sculptural autonomy. Taking away the stretcher, Lipke is able to make works that resolve themselves and speak to the total sensory apparatus of the artist’s body.

Casting aside the stretcher also allows Lipke to make works that are not strictly visual—even works that openly declare there’s nothing to see. The sense that you can seemingly pass through her paintings implies that something has been removed. Emancipating the depiction of the female body from stretchers, it might seem paradoxical that the image then becomes full of holes. But this is commentary on the tradition of painting, which has always liked to entrap women within the confines of a frame’s 90 degree angles. Sculptural in appearance if not intent, Lipke’s works are what remains after the woman has left the painting, exploding it in the wake of her exit.