



ARTS+

At Two New York Galleries, Welcome Gatherings and an Embrace of Optimism

If you want to get some idea of the peculiar grooves into which contemporary artists ensconce themselves, Clare Grill's pictures are a good place to start.



‘Clare Grill: At the Soft Stages’

Derek Eller Gallery, 300 Broome St.,

Manhattan

Until June 30

‘Becky Yazdan: Future Perfect’

Frosch & Company, 34 East Broadway

Until July 9

An announcement recently popped into my email box for an exhibition in which the phrase “none of that macho bulls—” figured significantly. The admonition wasn’t, I hasten to add, included in the promotional materials accompanying the current shows by Clare Grill or Becky Yazdan. Nonetheless, I was led to wonder if either artist, here in 2023, gives a wandering thought to machismo.

They must have at some point. Both are young painters who have come up through sundry (if not always congruent) iterations of Feminist theory. Ms. Grill is featured in “The Feminine in Abstract Painting,” on display at the Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation until July 15, and is now having her second solo exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery. Ms. Yazdan is also showing on the Lower East Side. Her debut one-person exhibition at Frosch & Company opened this past week.

The title of Ms. Grill’s show, “At the Soft Stages,” gives an indication of the tempo and physicality of her abstractions. Each canvas comes on like an inadvertent gathering of things situated within a space undergoing gestation. Think of the pictures as

compendiums of nouns caught within the propulsive logic of a verb.

Layering oils with a casual sense of measure, Ms. Grill establishes fields of lustrous color and punctuates them with oddments of shape and incident: scratchy linear motifs; feathered brushstrokes; scattered dabs and dashes; and bulbous forms that bop insouciantly between the geological and botanical. Some items are defined with a sense of dimensionality; others are discursive, almost doodle-like. Even canvases that are big in size — “Scuff” (2023), say, measures roughly 8 x 6 feet — retain a sense of offhandedness and intimacy.

Ms. Grill’s compositions are open-ended and expansive, but cognizant of the canvas edges. Her stated inspirations tap into pastimes

typically associated with domesticity and women: antique embroidery and documents from the 18th and 19th centuries detailing births, baptisms, and marriages. Miro's riffs on sewing machines seem a distant precedent, as do the trompe l'oeil panoramas of William Harnett. If you want to get some idea of the peculiar grooves into which contemporary artists ensconce themselves, Ms. Grill's pictures are a good place to start.





Becky Yazdan, 'Separation Anxiety,' 2023. Via Frosch & Company

Ms. Yazdan's paintings share some similarities with those of Ms. Grill, particularly in terms of process. Yet whereas Ms. Grill retains an airy or, at moments, aqueous sense of flow, Ms. Yazdan's pictures are more concrete — statements rather than suppositions. As a painter, she can be gruff with her surfaces,

scraping away layers of paint with a palette knife or obliterating previous states of an image with declamatory strokes of color. Getting down to brass tacks is this artist's m.o.

A tight-lipped humor filters its way through Ms. Yazdan's art. Upon tumultuous grounds built up over the course of months or, in some cases, years, the artist winds up with select and sometimes fairly minimal juxtapositions of stuff: diagrammatic clusters, milky runs of pigment, blotchy stackings of color, and shopworn geometric shapes. Ms. Yazdan is clearly a fan of Thomas Nozkowski's emblematic abstractions, but her pictures are altogether clunkier: Imagine Arthur Dove with a more Pop-wise palette and no less romantic because of it.



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The title of Ms. Yazdan's show is "Future Perfect," a foolhardy conceit, perhaps, for an age as vexing as our own. Yet I suspect Ms. Grill might agree with her compatriot's statement that "embracing an unknown outcome is ultimately an act of optimism and hope." New Yorkers less concerned with "macho bulls—" than a way out of our collective despond would do well to pay both exhibitions a visit.