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Julia Yerger
When Lottery
Melding Abstraction and Representation

Chateau Shatto
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by Jody Zellen



Julia Yerger’s paintings and collages on view at Chateau Shatto meld abstraction and representation. These hybrids are layered works in which outlined shapes resembling human figures are inserted into quasi-landscapes and cityscapes. While the images evoke recognizable spaces dotted with human forms, they are in essence formal explorations that investigate mark-making, tonality and color.

In *Beatles* (all works 2024), a central figure painted in shades of white and outlined with dark lines is surrounded by a crowd of featureless heads sketchily filled in with a range of pastel colors and roughly drawn lines. The main figure does not have a human head. A mop-like, red-pink shape appears where the head would be. A more skeletal form with a rectangular eye-patch blasts forth to the figure’s right, trailing a light blue-green cloud. The yellow-green background could be a park or other natural setting. Within this ambiguous space are tool-like mechanical shapes whose purposes remain a mystery.

The *Family Band* similarly depicts silhouetted figures — many of whom hold instruments — assembled against a deep blue background. Yerger delineates foreground and background spaces with the band in the background and its audience occupying the foreground in the lower half of the painting. Wearing a white t-shirt, the head of one of these cartoon-like figures is a blue spiral flanked by clenched fists. The other members of the crowd are less defined. Between the “band” and its audience stands a man reading a book. He wears a reddish shirt and pants with yellow and white stripes. As in *Beatles*, the scene is simultaneously familiar and disconcerting, spacious and flat.

Yerger’s collages combine found papers from comic books, magazines and newspapers with ink and matte medium. They are dizzying illustrations where recognizable elements intermingle with colorful geometric shapes to create visually compelling and strange narratives. *Welcome to..* juxtaposes reproductions of an air-bound snow-boarder, a rock-climber and a guitar-player collaged with snippets from comics and other black-and-white illustrations to become a surreal figure that travels through an unknown world

that spirals out toward the edges of the composition. Bits of text, as well as architectural elements allude to an inhabitable space, but never cohere.

Two women appear to embrace in the compelling painting *Opposite Sister*. The background is an off-white tree whose leaves and branches are drawn with different color lines. The tree is ghost-like yet present. In the lower portion of the composition, Yerger depicts two figures. The one with her back towards the viewer has purple hair and a reddish-maroon dress. The top of her head fuses with the trunk of the tree while some of its leaves mesh with her hair. The other figure is also abstracted with a pink face and no definable features, blue-green hair and wearing a green striped shirt. Yerger successfully combines different styles of painting — expressive brushstrokes, flat expanses of color and intricate lines — to capture the tender moment.

Yerger's works are not quick reads. Some of the components are unmistakable, and while there might be a moment of recognition, she obscures the familiar by layering the representational aspects of the images into an abstracted ground. These dynamic pieces have their own rhythm. They are culled together from disparate assets and filled with light and shadow to become unique worlds populated by ambiguous yet stately figures who hold their ground and seem to belong.

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