

Art Now LA, March 19, 2026

Gretchen Scherer

*Reading the Rooms: A Skewed but Realistic Perception*

Richard Heller Gallery

February 21 - March 21, 2026

by Jody Zellen



Salon Style is a term that refers to exhibitions where the works (paintings of all subjects, shapes and sizes) were hung in dense arrangements covering the walls from floor to ceiling. Begun in the 17th-Century, this was not only a popular method of display, but salon style chambers also became the subject of numerous paintings at the time.

In *Reading the Rooms*, Gretchen Scherer presents her latest salon style interiors: a subject she has been investigating for many years. Scherer begins by perusing art history books and the internet in search of photographs documenting these displays. Many of the images are from European palaces. When possible, Scherer visits the locations herself and makes photographs she later uses as source material for her paintings. She uses them as a point of departure, but often takes liberties, adding walls and furniture, as well as artworks that were not there or even created at that point in time. The result is a wonderful melange of real and imagined spaces.

In *Attingham Park, Picture Gallery, Early Morning* (2025) Scherer exaggerates the color and light to transform the picture gallery at this English country house and estate in Shropshire into a room rich in pink and purple hues. Her oil and acrylic painting offers a wide angle, but cropped view of an expansive sitting room. The foreground is dominated by a gold-trimmed burgundy rug that covers a highly reflective, possibly, marble floor. In the center of the rug, as well as against the walls are sculptures, pieces of ornate furniture including chairs, desks and tables, as well as other accoutrements that are commonplace in such lavish settings.

Filling the walls are an arrangement of different sized landscape and portrait paintings. Scherer renders the interior scene in a flat illustrative style, paying attention to details, yet not making it a photo-realist representation. Some of the pictures are what would be expected — formally posed and fancily dressed men and woman looking out at the viewer, while others are portraits that feel a bit too contemporary for the time. Looking closely reveals Scherer's subtle and animated interventions. In this painting, one sculpted bust smiles as it leans over to look at another.

In *Gothic Hall, The Hague* (2025), Scherer reimagines the interior of this hall in the Kneuterdijk Palace in the Hague. In Scherer's version, not only the walls of the vast space are filled with artworks, but numerous canvases are placed on easels scattered across the floor. The painted reproductions range from depictions of men on horses, soldiers in uniform as well as classical portraits of individuals, presumably from the extended family. Among the paintings are treasures that don't belong there, including Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* placed on an easel toward the bottom of the canvas. This work is actually located at the Mauritshuis in the Hague.

*A Conservatory With Paintings*, (2025-26) is a depiction of a vast interior space whose exterior is surrounded by plants and trees. Light filters into the room through numerous tall windows and skylights that reflect the abundance of plants outside. The conservatory's black, white and gray floor is made up of a complex pattern that takes the eye toward the back of the space. Numerous easels are set up facing the viewer, each supporting a French Impressionistic-style painting. These artworks are juxtaposed with numerous vases filled with colorful flowers.

Animals find their way into Scherer's depiction of *Rosa Bonheur's Studio, Château de By*, 2026. This is a painting of the former studio of the French artist Rosa Bonheur. Scherer's creation includes a beautiful parquet floor and large bank of windows, as well as a large self portrait of Bonheur with her dog by her side in front of a painting of a white horse. Many of the elements within this painting are visible in photographs of the space, but Scherer ad-libs others. Numerous taxidermy animals appear within the cluttered composition. It is clear that Scherer has a sense of humor and enjoys creating interactions within her paintings, For example, a fox playfully chases a seal that hides beneath a chair while other animals look at each other as well as their painted likenesses.

Scherer excels in painting these dense rooms filled with artwork, books, tables, chairs, and myriad knick-knacks. She captures a sense of depth while at the same time allows the spaces to flatten, the perspective skewed but still realistic. As the eye darts around the compositions it lingers on the details and what is unusual or out of place, be it tottering tea cups, or unusual gestures and glances that animate the painted portraits strewn across the walls. The works play with the relationship between order and disorder. Scherer invites the viewer to get lost in the paintings and to reflect on her collaging of artwork and architecture from different eras while to thinking about the original inhabitants and how they might have interpreted their surroundings.

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