

Art and Cake, April 6, 2018

Katherine Sherwood: The Interior of the Yelling Clinic at Walter Maciel Gallery
March 3 – April 28, 2018

By Jody Zellen



Katherine Sherwood is a well known and respected Bay Area artist and educator. She was a professor of Art Practice at University of California Berkeley for 30 years and is now a Professor Emeritus. Though she has connections to Los Angeles, she has not been featured in a solo exhibition here for many years. It is a rare treat to see both new and old works on view at Walter Maciel Gallery presented together under the title, *The Interior of the Yelling Clinic*.

Core to Sherwood's practice is the fact that she had a debilitating cerebral hemorrhage that occurred twenty-two years ago when she was 44, requiring her to overcome paralysis and learn to paint with the opposite hand. The illness drastically changed her attitude and style of painting as the work took into consideration and presented scans of her brain activity. In 2008 Sherwood co-founded the Yelling Clinic, an art collective with five members, each interested in the intersection between war and disability and with a desire to mix artistic practices and community outreach. To yell is to have a voice, states Sherwood. Her contribution to the art of the Yelling Clinic was a series of mixed media paintings that resembled figures, entitled *Healers from the Yelling Clinic* (2010). At Walter Maciel Gallery, these works are installed on a grey wall in a

horizontal line. Each piece features an image of neuro-anatomy from the 15th to the 21st century positioned as a head or other body part. These photographic elements are painted over and around, suggesting other aspects of the body and juxtaposed with fabric that becomes pants or a skirt. The figures represent healers and the works are meant to speak to the body's ability to heal itself. These intriguing works serve as the introduction to Sherwood's newer pieces.

In the main gallery, Sherwood presents a series of still-lives and Odalisques drawn from different periods of art history. In each work, the reclining venuses are shown with a disability— be it a cane, a leg brace or missing limb. The head in each appropriated rendition is a scan of Sherwood's brain. The painted figures casually rest atop an abstract patterned fabric. The surface upon which Sherwood paints is a patchwork of discarded reproductions that were used as teaching aids in art history courses before slides and then digital reproductions became the norm. Sherwood composites these varying sized reproductions together and although she paints on the blank canvas, she allows the various identifying markings and hand written artist's names to remain. For example, in *Olympia* (2014) modeled on Manet's 1893 work, Sherwood transforms the naked figure by replacing her head with a brain scan, surrounded by a floral crown. She is faithful to the position of the left hand and includes the bracelet on the right forearm. The reclining woman sits upon a patterned throw rather than white sheets and her sensual white left leg now is encased in a brace. Sherwood's depictions shy away from pearly white skin— her Venus are mixed race, with dark skin tones. In addition to the five Venus, Sherwood also includes a series of still-lives based on well known paintings. Like in the figures, Sherwood inserts brain scans using them as floral decoration.

Peonies after Manet (2017) is based on a Manet painting *Peonies in a Vase* from 1864. Sherwood's version follows Manet's composition— a glass vase filled with mostly pink and red flowers— however Sherwood replaces some of the flowers with black and white collages of brain scans in addition to setting the vase on a patterned tablecloth rather than the bare wood. *Poppies* (2018) references Van Gogh's *Vase with Red Poppies and Daisies* (1890) and again, Sherwood has faithfully reproduced Van Gogh's composition while subtly inserting flowers made from brain imagery and setting the vase on a black and white checkerboard table. The background in the still-lives are also the mangled and wrinkled art history prints with ambiguous references in their corners like Giot 604 (a reference to Giotto perhaps?). The image *Flowers and Fruit*, (2014) is suspended from the ceiling allowing curious viewers to see the back side, a taped together collage of art prints that includes landscape and portrait paintings including one by Cezanne.

While the reproductions that Sherwood paints upon does not direct the specifics of her imagery, it is significant that she is reworking the canon of art history. She is taking a stand, speaking out for those who are other in some fashion, making beautiful and empowering works.

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