

# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

by William Eckhardt Kohler

## After the Storm: Jackie Gendel at Jeff Bailey Gallery

Posted: 02/01/2013 5:57 pm

Jackie Gendel's installation at Jeff Bailey Gallery, "Revenge of the Same," is a continuation of sorts from her exhibit at the gallery, which was closed due to damage from Sandy flooding. I had been both intrigued and provoked by the November incarnation, titled "Comedy of Manners," but each time I tried to write about it I found I had buried myself beneath verbal detritus that never really added up to any kind of clear statement. Setting aside my own authorial shortcomings, there was something appropriate about this struggle in relation to Gendel's paintings. Her working method consists of a great deal of layering of color patches in often discordant and clashing combinations with figures drawn in slashing lines that recall a bevy of art historical references; Matisse, Dufy, Picasso, Picabia, 17th to 19th century mannerism, Fragonard and Boucher, 1st and 2nd generation Abstract Expressionism and, I have no doubt, others. The underneath strata of the painting often peak out from beneath top layers so that it's possible to see how Gendel turns the canvas, changing the pictorial orientation and adding to the way the elements compete and become chaotic.



Jackie Gendel, Comedy of Manners, 2012, oil on canvas over panel, 34" x 44"

I liked the paintings and found myself continuing to think about them, perhaps because of, rather than in spite of, their opacity. There is something really wonderful about Gendel's ambition, as if the artist wanted to have it all -- abstraction, representation, narrative, concept, process, and emotional and intellectual content, straddling both contemporary and traditional values. There is also real pleasure in her bravura handling of juicy paint and rich and strange color chords, the finesse of her slashing line drawing, and the audacity of drawing on such a range of unfashionable or difficult to integrate source material.

I had planned on making more trips to see the show again, when Sandy struck and the gallery was among those badly flooded, closing down for nearly three months. (Gendel's paintings, above the high water mark, were not damaged.) I was very happy then, for the artist, for the gallery and, selfishly, for myself, when I heard that the gallery was reopening, and with this show.

This version includes all new work save four returns, all now hung in the once flooded basement, placing them, metaphorically, underwater. Upstairs, several of the canvases are include stenciled waves. Gendel has used a garden pesticide sprayer with oil paint (with torn paper as stencils), the wave imagery dominating the previous incarnations of each painting, invoking a clear reference to the Sandy-flood and the following recovery. Gendel thereby deftly achieves two things; one the viewer is allowed into the previously solipsistic narrative and two, the pictorial chaos has been effectively organized. On top of this, the stenciled areas have the casual look of sponge painting, a device more likely to be found in a homemade children's room mural or a low-end neighborhood restaurant, bringing a lightness to the otherwise anxious proceedings.

The most successful piece here is unique among her works that I've encountered: a large canvas, more crammed with heads than usual and painted in a range of styles, have been over painted with sharp edged geometrically structured white shapes. The effect is multi fold; on one hand the chaotic goings on are organized by the grid, much as the wave motif had in the other paintings. At the same time the white reads very much like a wall, visually dissolving into the white walls of the gallery, so that the painting underneath reads as a grouping of small paintings installed on a wall. However, because the white is painted on top, and with such definitiveness, it becomes a cancellation of the underneath imagery. So, the physical positive reads as negative space, while simultaneously fracturing and unifying the underneath imagery.

This cancellation is, I believe, a core value of Gendel's work. One of the clearest pieces in the November show was a small water based drawing in which the upper left diagonal half of the painting, an image of two figure reminiscent of Fuseli, was painted out with a not quite entirely opaque gray triangle thereby integrating and relating the drama of the pictorial fiction with the evolving painterly process.

The press release states that in this version of the show, Gendel intended to "register the emotional high water mark of the artwork rescue effort and the conviviality that the art community fostered after the storm." On top of that, I would argue that the shared story and experience has shifted Gendel's paintings beyond the personal and inspired a formal leap forward in her work. Here's to hoping that her continued evolution will take place under calmer conditions.



*Jackie Gendel, Carried Woman II, 2013, oil on canvas, 72 x 60"*



*Jackie Gendel, Party Line, 2013, oil on canvas, 64 x 51"*



*Jackie Gendel, Judith II, 2011, Watercolor, gouache and ink on paper, 12 3/8 x 10 13/16"*