



Conflict of Interest

Review / Elizabeth McDonald: I Only Know Plenty

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Installation image courtesy of grayDUCK Gallery.

Elizabeth McDonald: I Only Know Plenty

grayDUCK Gallery

May 15 – June 21, 2015

The subjects of paintings, videos, and sculptures in Elizabeth McDonald's latest show, from Japanese pop star Minami to Frankenstein, all bear the pain of being a scapegoat.

While some of the distressing situations and the connections between them are more abstruse than others, a mood of atonement unites the content.

However, the internal sorrows depicted within many of the pieces are in contrast to the joy with which McDonald makes them, particularly the enthusiasm with which she paints. The show's title, *I Only Know Plenty*, provides a punch. Producing large luscious paintings that portray far off suffering reflects the pleasure one takes in watching a tragedy from afar. I observe with glee from the advantaged perspective of only knowing plenty, and am then confronted with my mirth and compartment. In this case, my joy not only comes from a thankfulness that I'm not a part of these situations, but also from my empathy. When you have plenty, simply appreciating the plight of those who don't alleviates guilt, even if it doesn't change much.



Rasa Cloth, 2015, oil, watercolor, and ink on canvas, 77 x 127 inches.

I don't take the broad ranging topics as a didactic plea from McDonald to learn more about specifics. The show's arcana—ancient Greek sculptural tropes, post-war French shame, and wig production to name a few—are not suggestions to research. When confronted with a large amount of history and iconography that isn't familiar to me, I stop trying to make sense of every detail and instead experience it as a poetic horizontal combination. As such, the show feels complete.



Installation image courtesy of grayDUCK Gallery.

Similar to McDonald's hand, the density of the show has an energy that undercuts the tragic content and creates conflict. The vitality being sapped from the subjects has found its way to the gallery. Aside from a couple of glib inclusions—I'm not sure how the scaffolding with high heels and doorstops fits in—I follow McDonald's leaps willingly.

McDonald acts quickly and with relish. She uses materials, subjects, and formats freely. In a state of opulence, a real scapegoat is unnecessary, and in place of the restraint associated with atonement we have the supposed freedoms of the wide open market.



All that Ever Was, 2015, oil, watercolor, and ink on cavas, 109 x 109 inches.

Aaron Meyers is an artist currently working in Austin, Texas. Originally From Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he holds a BS in mathematics from Bucknell University and an MFA in Studio Art from The University of Texas at Austin. He makes the best mouse wheels money can buy.