

Weekend

FINE ARTS
LEISURE

The New York Times

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'Girls Gone Wild'

Bronwyn Keenan Gallery
3 Crosby Street, SoHo
Through July 11

Despite the title of this exhibition, the 12 women represented have not gone all that wild. They're still mostly painting on stretched canvases that, once complete, hang on the wall in the usual way. But taken together, their styles, techniques and subjects are strikingly diverse and consistently nervy in a way that bodes well for the state of painting.

Most of the work falls between the extremes of the crafty perfection of Cynthia Sisson's small, meticulously dotted surfaces (whose floral motifs are not as demure as they seem) and the slightly abject casualness of Bella Foster's "Wicked Forest," a Polke-like mass of pale brown stains and drips transformed into a thicket by the addition of some small red leaves. Stain painting is put to new uses and pushed to different, impressive extremes in the work of Katherine Bernhardt and Susanna Vapnek. Bettina Sellmann evokes its tradition by partly washing away a finely drawn image of yet another dreamy young thing who might be drowning in her own tears.

Mari Eastman, Mary Weatherford and Terra Fuller hover between the representational and the abstract in a painterly fashion, while Stephanie Campos sticks with abstraction, and a slightly funky geometry reminiscent of late-1970's abstraction. A tough-as-nails figurative style is used to good effect in "Madonna" by Dawn Mellor and "The Artist as Sister Cat Woman" by Karen Heagle, who has an equally strident solo show at 31 Grand Street, an art gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, through Sunday. And finally, Jutta Koether's fierce, slapdash way with paint and color presides over the ensemble like a guiding spirit, an éminence without a hint of grise.

ROBERTA SMITH