

# A Garland for

*I make gouache studies until I come up with an image that can be read in its totality. At that point I have internalized the image, or memorized it. Then I go to the larger canvas using oil paint. It is important for me to stay in the process of putting the paint down; the link to kinetic activity is all-important to me. I don't want to be in the situation of painting an image that I cooked up in my head—that would be too much like illustration.*

Judith Linhares (from a conversation with Madison Smartt Bell, Bomb, Fall 2006)

Let's enter the charmed world of Judith Linhares, the intuitive, psychically refreshing world of her pictures. If there were a car in her work, it would not be found on the street, or in a garage. In her reveries, roads are narrow paths that lead uphill to isolated houses that resemble misshapen log cabins, houses deformed in dream-like ways as if built by merry pranksters. Linhares answers the question of how to make a painting read with power and immediacy the way the great abstract paintings do, and at the same time not give up the pleasure of making figurative storytelling images.

Linhares paints what needs to be seen; each work is like a single-image novel, telling stories she wants us to enjoy. Years ago she described this process as "visualizing pictures which I associate with certain feelings instead of forcing rational verbal communication. It has made me aware of how much I hallucinate and how many pictures are running through my head constantly. Because I'm visually oriented, it was a relief to me to be able to know myself through pictures because the pictures come easily to me."

Can a man get a place at table in her garish, self-reliant, elemental, hedonistic, women's world? A world where for forty years she has served generous quantities of fire and water, of earth and air, where she has provided liberated color and fearless brushwork as etheric context and sylvan setting for the activities, way-stations, dreamy lounging, and purposeful doings of her protagonists? But in the blink of an eye, I'm already there, an outsider looking in, seduced by the color, amazed by the candor, chastened by the sadness, and happily mesmerized. I would offer to carry her pails of milk if I could find where she keeps her cows.

Stew anyone? Pollen? A siren's song? A strand of seaweed? The deposition of Odysseus as Edenic woman? The thyroid condition of huge bumble bees? Strums of a gingerbread witch? Much written about, and well, by scribes over a thirty-year period, let this Garland for Judy be strung.

Geoffrey Young, guest curator



# Judith Linhares

**Jennifer Riley:** "Linhares has practically invented the genre of imaginative figurative painting largely populated by confident young women engaged in activities ranging from the banal to the idiosyncratic, thus paving the way for artists such as Amy Cutler, Hillary Harkness, and Dana Schutz." "Her figures come in all colors and tend toward slightly cartoony, elfin shapes....They are involved in climbing trees, lounging on a blanket on a moonlit night, and daydreaming atop a pile of logs....Echoes of mythical and archetypal tales are ferried in upon swaths of color, and like potions, take effect over time." "We happen upon these scenes as if from a boat gliding merrily along a shore."

**Carly Berwick:** "Her big gestures carry intimate narratives...her bulky, extravagant brushstrokes and rich, almost edible colors, while conveying plenty of emotion, are supremely unselfish." "Her work filters a lifetime of mistakes and passions through some demented and wonderful painting."

**Ken Johnson:** "She has tapped into her own rambunctious and starry-eyed inner child to wonderfully infectious effect. Her dreamy images convey the feeling of a psyche intensely alive to its own energies and possibilities. You sense that excitement in the paint itself."

**Whitney Chadwick:** "Linhares is an artist for whom painting has always mattered as the surest path of synthesizing experience and interior life. Emerging as if by magic from an alchemical stew of vivid complementary hues and muted tonalities—evidence of her practice of beginning with color washes rather than predetermined subjects—her paintings are harnessed to the mundane world of everyday reality with straightforward titles." "As the oils and gouaches have expanded in size they have developed a kind of magisterial calm despite her adherence to a kind of neo-expressionist paint handling. She has relinquished none of her commitment to intimate personalization and to the elaboration of a highly distinctive figuration."

**John FitzGibbon:** "We remember in the presence of her work, the role played in the formation of our personality by the tree, the star, the lake, the cave, the hearth, the castle-in-the-sky, the ghost bicycle, the path, the moon, the solar boats, the bird, the horse, the corridor, the gazebo, the gate, the magic carpet, and so on." "Her art comes across as a sort of meditated ecstasy, lingering, satisfying, and somehow healing... One secret of her work is that her lushness of expression walks hand in hand with a sharp economy of means. No present day paintings are so unaffectedly archetypal."

**Brooks Adams:** "In her strange, luminous, hard-won pictorial universe, seemingly obdurate contradictions are loosened up and reconciled. A rigorous feminism, for instance, co-exists with an almost beatific universalism; a Californian funkiness has been cut with the tonic, anxious glare of New York; a puritanical core of strict abstraction lurks within a climate of emotional and imagistic fervor worthy of a Mexican shrine; and an incipient, recession-flavored, grass-roots populism is at once animated by a Matissean joy in color, and tempered by an inherently effete Symbolist style." "Judith Linhares is an acknowledged master of gouache."

**David Pagel:** "Linhares's juicy paintings of corny subjects—including clichéd still lifes, silly children's book critters, cheesy cartoon landscapes, and lumpy nudes doing their own thing far from the bright lights of the big city—are also profoundly heartening. The best ones transform incidental details, common scenes, and otherwise forgettable moments into the high points of life—not the earth-shattering stuff of big-budget Hollywood productions, or the life-changing truths painfully wrenched from therapy sessions, or even the subtle little epiphanies favored by literary sessions. Instead, the blunt loveliness of simple things takes vivid shape in her point-blank pictures, which give form to those magical moments when your pulse seems to beat with a rhythm that's in tune with the hum and buzz of its surroundings. The inner world of subjectivity—of dreams, memories, and fantasies—connects with the external world of dirt, plants, and animals, via the rudimentary activities of living (i.e., working, eating, and relaxing) in Linhares's deftly messy images of meaty stick figures cooking, cleaning, and schlepping, like the rest of us, but still finding time to dance around campfires, skinny-dip in moonlit lakes, and sunbathe buck naked on rocky outcrops, without a worry in the world."

**Judith Dunham:** "Linhares long ago achieved the status of quiet mentor of artists drawn to her use of narrative and the complex personality that is implied beneath it." "Her painting refuses to turn archetypal human themes into stylistic cliché."

**David Pagel** (again): "Linhares's paintings have the vivid instantaneousness of dreams, in which you see everything in a split-second, more clearly and starkly than in waking life. Despite violating the rules of perspective, the niceties of composition, and the expectations of good taste, these paintings hold together—loosely and freely, and sometimes, just barely. This give and take—between singular, iconic image and scattershot, freewheeling chaos—endows her art with moxie and verve. Even better, it acquaints viewers with an animated, ever-changing world, where one small step is all it takes to go from the ordinary to the extraordinary."

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Sources: Jennifer Riley, "Judith Linhares," *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2006; Carly Berwick, *ARTnews*, Summer 2006; Ken Johnson, Review. *The New York Times*, April 14, 2006; Whitney Chadwick, *Sweet Talk* exhibition catalogue. Edward Thorpe Gallery, 2001; John FitzGibbon, *California A-Z And Return* exhibition catalogue. The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, 1990; Brooks Adams, *The Art of Dangerous Pleasures* exhibition catalogue. University Art Gallery, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, 1994; David Pagel, *Judith Linhares, Divine Intoxication* exhibition catalogue. Chapman University, Orange, California, Fall 2006; Judith Dunham, "Judith Linhares," *Vanguard*, September 1983.