

Dawn's Early Light

Naked women in trees, around fires, and riding horses

by Jerry Saltz

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Lately there's been a spate of good shows by older painters at the top of their game. In the last month in Chesea alone we've seen Louise Fishman, 67, Thomas Nozkowski, 62, Jake Berthot, 66, Yvonne Thomas, 93, Marjorie Welish, 61, and Natvar Bhavsar, 70, all of whose work looks better than ever. Some say older artists are fairing well because painting takes a long time to get good at. More likely, the big-bad-booming art market is creating giant nooks for older artists where it used to create only crannies.



Star Light, 2005

photo: Courtesy Edward Thorp Gallery

Currently surging through one of these openings is Judith Linhares, 66, whose exhibition, "Rowing in Eden"—a title evoking deluge, delight, and redemption—is a bold breath of fresh air. In her move toward an even more lit-up, less murky palette, this already painterly painter gives us images of naked women in trees, around fires, and riding horses. We're also treated to a funny bunny and a strong group of Marsden Hartley-like flower paintings.

Linhares moved here from San Francisco in 1980, but her West Coast roots often show. There are streaks of Elmer Bischoff's creamy paint and warm color and Peter Saul's wildness. The ghost of Dana Schutz's recent work hovers over this exhibition. Similarities exist between these artists, but the differences are significant. Schutz's color is sunburned, strange, and more original; Linhares's is more like meringue. Schutz's world is manic, formal, and fought for; the structure of her work is almost sculptural; Linhares's is mythic, airy, and executed in an easygoing but adept manner. Schutz may only be 29 but I believe her work has helped free up Linhares, as well as a number of other somewhat older artists (including Cecily Brown).

Regardless, Linhares is harnessing her color, composition, and brushwork in ways that lift her new paintings from her former cartooniness and expressionism onto a breezy, deeply felt, fairy-tale plane of their own.