

Collected Works

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You and I are sure we've seen these paintings before. We know them, and yet they have changed. We've even seen them in this group before – but not quite. These are paintings about how painting, and the history of painting, can be changed.

Hornick's paintings look alike, and also as if they came from many times or places. They are all small without being tiny. Apartment-wall sized would be one way of measuring their scale. They aren't identical to each other in size, but they are all more or less the same size. The same is true of their subject and style, sort of. They are all portraits of women, and all the portraits have been supplemented by a creature: bear, moth, grasshopper, and so forth. The portraits also look as if they were all painted by the same person, in terms of the way paint is handled, with an admirably crafted and meticulously brushed realism. Yet it doesn't take much art historical training to instantly recognize that each one comes out of the history of western painting since the Renaissance. Each one recalls a somewhat well-known painting by a different very famous painter: Raphael, Titian, Rubens, Goya, Ingres etc... You do need one of each of those to have an important art collection.

Are they copies? Yes and no. In a way, each one is a copy of the work of an Old Master. (And I mean Master – they're all men.) The figures are basically copied, as is the color and composition.

Are they reproductions? Getting close. They look more like copies of color reproductions of paintings than they do like the original paintings. Hornick works from paintings the way most of us know them. We may go to museums occasionally, and when we do, we are struck by the real scale, color, and brushwork of paintings, which are so important to their quality, and yet almost all the time we encounter the sort of great paintings Hornick copies, it is in the form of reproductions: books, posters, postcards, ads, and now on the internet. In reproductions, scale doesn't matter anymore, let alone an original setting, and we can barely see how an artist how the artist applied pigment to panel or canvas.

Are they a collection of reproductions? Getting closer. The way we encounter paintings as reproductions takes them out of their original spatial, chronological, and geographic context and puts them into new constellations. Whoever creates those constellations, Hornick in this case, makes us see them differently, drawing our attention to affinities or contrasts we had not previously considered. Collecting puts old art into our present in new ways.

Clearly, Hornick is asking us to think about how portraits have treated women across the history of art. Certainly the history of art is full of portraits of women. Famously, theories of the gaze tell us that men look and women are looked at. John Berger articulated the idea in that succinct phrase. Other theorists have refined and developed the idea with extreme sophistication and have deeply influenced at least two generations of artists and art historians. So does this project remind us that the whole history of western painting has urged us to look at women? Perhaps. Another possibility, completely compatible, is that this project is about women looking back at the history of art.

The supplementary creatures in Hornick's paintings make them strange, strange and marvelous. The creatures themselves are fantastical, though realistically painted, as if they had been copied from another kind of reproduced image, from illustrations in a natural history lesson. These are not ordinary animals, insects, fish or birds which urban people encounter every day. They are totemic creatures: non-human forces which each female figure seems to have summoned, to express an inner laughter, desire, energy or fear, to act as a guardian, to intimidate or maybe mock the viewer. Hornick's paintings suggest that the culture which produced these images of women must have been in some profound way insufficient, since they needed to be supplemented by the forces of nature. If that seems like too serious a comment to make, let me add that Hornick's paintings do their work with a wink. A delightful gurgle of laughter wells up through them.

Hornick's creatures are themselves fabulous (in the sense of fabled), and also have an effect on our perception of the images (the sum of the original and all its reproductions) to which they have been added. Hence "supplements." Memory struggles upstream in time to recall what might have been overlooked. The history of art has been called into question. Was there always something missing in those original portraits – was there always something suppressed?

Hornick looks back at the history of art to look at it differently. Image by image, this could be another project of reclamation and redress. But then there's also the possibility that the project as a whole looks back in a slightly different way at the history of art by collecting it. For centuries, women have been more often allowed the role of collector than of maker. Women -- like Isabella d'Este in the Renaissance, Isabella Stewart Gardner in the Gilded Age, and Dominique de Menil during the glory days of Modernism -- exerted authority in the art world with their purchasing power. Their creation is the collection. This project is a kind of collection, in which the collector's possession of the image is made abundantly evident by the several ways in which she has rendered the objects like each other, and left her mark on them in the form of the creatures. (We should remember that at least one collecting tradition believed that collectors should leave their permanent mark on their treasures, often quite prominently. Great Chinese collectors added red collector's marks and calligraphic commentary to their precious ink paintings.)

Hornick, however, does more than mark her collected images. She remakes them. If they entered the field of her knowledge as reproductions, she has re-made them as

distinctly hand-made paintings. If she was initially attracted to them out of respect for the canonical status of their authors, she has undercut the serious sanctity of their reputations with her whimsy. Out of the culture of the copy can come a new originality. Out of the sexist history of women in art can come a good laugh.