

Melanie Flood Projects

What do shimmering, lustrous, luminous, exotic nail polishes have in common with dreamily painted impressionistic canvases? The artist Rosalie Knox, who has found an enticing new medium for her work, familiar to anyone who has hoped to enhance the natural beauty of their nails. And to secretly--or not so secretly—signal a key part of their core personality, while at the same time indulging in a time-honored pampering ritual.

Although this is her debut show at the gallery, Knox is not at all new to the art world. During the 90s and through the first decade and a half of the new millennium, she participated in and chronicled the constant creative collision of the club and fashion worlds, starting her own high-end line of tie-dyed t-shirts; becoming the house photographer for the fashion designer Susan Cianciolo; and documenting the “X Girl” fashion line created by Sonic Youth’s Kim Gordon.

All the while, she was amassing an extraordinary archive of photographs of New York’s multi-disciplinary cultural scene, some of which she showed at various galleries, including several group shows at American Fine Arts, where she worked during the mid-90s. Knox’s photographs of this peak New York cultural period remain in continuous circulation, frequently appearing in well-known print publications and on social media platforms.

Knox wasn’t just an observer: she was also actively involved in a number of performance art groups, including the glam-punk band, The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black; she even played a nun in *Pinochet Porn*, the epic underground Super-8 film by the late feminist artist Ellen Cantor.

Knox’s wide-ranging cultural immersions have culminated in her most recent practice, painting, which she began in 2017. Her canvases contain clear traces of two of her earlier endeavors: fashion and her long-time passion for nail polish, which she has combined to create an original body of work.

Knox first introduced her extensive personal collection of nail polish into her art in the mid-1990s, when she devised a “portable nail salon,” consisting of just a table and a few chairs that she set up at the back of American Fine Arts, where she worked at the time. This was later performed at the legendary Gramercy Art Fair in 1996, courtesy of fellow artist Tom Sachs, who had seen it in the gallery. That manicure-performance eventually evolved into a regular Saturday afternoon event at Sweet 303, a salon in the Chelsea Hotel. And in 2012, it became a “black light nails experience,” in the basement of the Pyramid Club, a famous East Village haunt, on the last Friday of each month. With a nod to the Rankin/Bass anime film *The Last Unicorn*, based on Peter Beagle’s 1967 fantasy story, Knox and her collaborator, Jacquelyn Gallo, hosted a “Last Unicorn” party, decorated with a major unicorn motif. As a line-up of downtown music and theater acts performed, Knox painted club-goers’ nails with phosphorescent, iridescent, glittering, glowing hues, all gleaned from her enormous nail polish collection of 3,000 or more bottles.

Knox was hardly alone in her fascination with the gem-colored- liquid-filled miniature vials, which had engendered its own nail- polish subculture, eventually worthy of a 2014 write-up in the *New York Times*. As she herself described the allure to the *Times*, “It’s an easy thing to collect. It’s small. It’s a collection you can maintain. It doesn’t impose on the rest of your life. It’s affordable.” She acknowledged that her ultraviolet manicures were an “intimate” act. But, she said, it wasn’t about prettiness or status brands. “It’s just about the colors.”

The same could emphatically be said of the three jewel-like paintings currently on display at CHART. Knox has developed her own spin on nail polish as a painting medium, one that seamlessly incorporates her tie-dye expertise, her performance experience and her sophisticated visual eye. The 40 by 40-inch works are created on fine Belgian linen that Knox has dyed in delicate tints, stretching the linen right over the stretcher bars. This color field background (its pattern narrowly revealed on the stretcher bars) serves to dramatically enhance the vivid spectrum of nail- polish colors, layered with acrylic paint and polyurethane, all applied by Knox in admirably restrained drips and pours. As gallerist Clara Ha puts it, “Every aspect of her paintings are informed by her previous practices, and then interweaved.”

The resulting works are extravagantly lush—almost romantic--in their richly symphonic hues and tone, while at the same time evoking a serene, centered, dreamlike atmosphere, like a calm before a storm. As a visual bonus, each work instantly transforms into something strikingly different under ultraviolet light.