

In Silke Otto-Knapp's new works rooms, screens (partitions, windows, paintings within paintings) and stages together form a picture of what painting could be as a space of appearance: spaces become screens; screens become paintings; paintings become stages. As figures and their backdrops emerge from colours and surfaces these painted forms reveal themselves to be exactly what they are, while exploring the settings in which women have appeared and performed throughout the history of modernity.

A figure around which a number of the scenarios converge is Florine Stettheimer: painter and host to salons in the apartment on West 58th Street shared by her and her sisters in the 1920s and 30s.

*In vain, Feder attempted to explain to Florine, to Virgil, to me, to anyone who would listen, that there was no such thing as white light in the spectrum - that it was obtained by the expert mixing of primary colours projected through various shades of red, blue and yellow gelatin in the two hundred or more projectors with which he had covered the ceiling and sides of Chick's theatre. Florine repeated that she wanted clear white light - as in her model. Feder refused to believe her. For three successive nights he had the escape artists and his crew clambering up and down ladders, changing gelatins, which he then blended with infinite care and skill at diverse intensities. And each morning, when he proudly exhibited the night's work to Florine, she would say quietly that what she wanted was clear, white light. Reluctant and unconvinced, he finally gave it to her at dress rehearsal, and she was grateful. He had a more rewarding time with the blues and greens of the second act at picnic and deeper cobalt of the Spanish sky darkening for the appearance of the Holy Ghost and achieving a livid splendor during the procession in the third.*

Motifs depart to and return from different places. There are scenes from Ingmar Bergman, echoes from Chekhov's Three Sisters, revenants of the Bronte sisters, perhaps, and many other figures, confronting the gaze or turning away, towards and from each other.

Otto-Knapp's new paintings project different scenes, moments and constellations, yet do not follow a central plot, biography or choreography. What the paintings foreground rather is the moment and motion of appearance itself: the way spaces open up, and how figures make their appearance on the stage of these spaces. And the making of appearance is also always what painting does as a medium, creating visibility in its own particular mode. It is these two modes of appearance - social and painterly - that Otto Knapp merges, dissects and recomposes in paintings which address their own form in the same breath as affirming presence.

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