

## Portraits

Tisch Abelow & Paul Harris

June 28 - July 31, 2024

The Paul Harris & Marguerite Kirk Gallery  
190 Skyway Blvd # 2, Belgrade, MT 59714

To keep our internal worlds manageable, we try to separate thoughts and feelings. But like the narrow part of an hourglass, there must be a nodal point where the two meet; this point holds condensed information, more than we can bear. That energy becomes a vast somatic plane where wordlessness abounds. Rather than a slip of the tongue, or *oh no, I've said too much!* it's the opposite - the tongue stuck on a series of rough sandpapery mini-halts - beautiful, guttural, jabs, and gabs of stuttering and shuddering, where a groan has a grip on us.

It seems that in a past life Paul Harris and Tisch Abelow agreed to stay in the nodal point, in an ever-moment of both amnesia and revelation. Their work seduces us: our logic wants to jump in the middle of the scene and generate stories to understand the situation. Paul Harris' woman faints, but with the luck of a rigid arm, she presents her ass to the air. Eyeless, she "looks" below the couch, as we gaze her behind. We try to sit on our hands in an attempt to stop fidgeting, but the hands of Harris' chair get to us first. Tisch Abelow renders the wedding as both a marriage and a death, a reminder that the skull is the backdrop of any grin. With each taut smile in Abelow's paintings, the figures inflect the fallacy inherent to portraiture. Harris' erasure of facial features is Abelow's crosshair, her target. *What's that expression on her face?* Abelow turns the whites of the eyes into nails. Harris avoids eyes altogether but supplies limbs to Abelow's disappearing torsos.

We often refer to pattern as mere ornament, just some extra stuff on top. We overlay prints, textiles, and wallpaper on our shirts, chairs, and walls; repeat that flower motif, one hundred times. Instead, Abelow and Harris make pattern perform as a soft but blatant avoidance, an externalized mask, or an agent of control. *I am not sitting, I am sitting on flowers!* The patterns move around to form a stage, tableau, diorama - a mise-en-scene, where *something must have happened*.

These artworks visually fuse people, people and environments, and environments to all the history that wears out cushions and dirties the baseboard. Both Abelow and Harris say, the psyche imbues everything, we are the chair, we are plugged into the wall behind us! And when we actually acknowledge this, along with said nodal point, like Harris' figure, we faint, and a flash of truth - a groan - escapes.

*Text by Rose Marcus*

**Tisch Abelow** (b. 1985) is an artist based in New York City, NY. She received her BA from Sarah Lawrence College and her MA from the New York Graduate School of Psychoanalysis. Abelow has exhibited widely at galleries such as Michael Thibault, Jack Hanley, Nina Johnson, and Freddy. Her practice incorporates painting, curation, writing, and video work.

**Paul Harris** (1925-2018, b. Orlando, FL, d. Bozeman, MT) was an American sculptor and lithographer. Harris studied under Hans Hofmann in 1949 and received an MFA from the University of New Mexico in 1950. His work has been exhibited at MoMA, SF MOMA, LACMA, and various museums and institutions in Europe and South America. He was a Fulbright professor in Chile, a MacDowell Colony resident, a Guggenheim recipient and a visiting artist at the Rinehardt School of Sculpture, Baltimore. He taught at New York University, University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco Art Institute prior to becoming a faculty member at California College of Art 1968, where he taught until 1992. His home and studio were in Bolinas, California.