

OLD MORTALITY

Emma Rose Schwartz

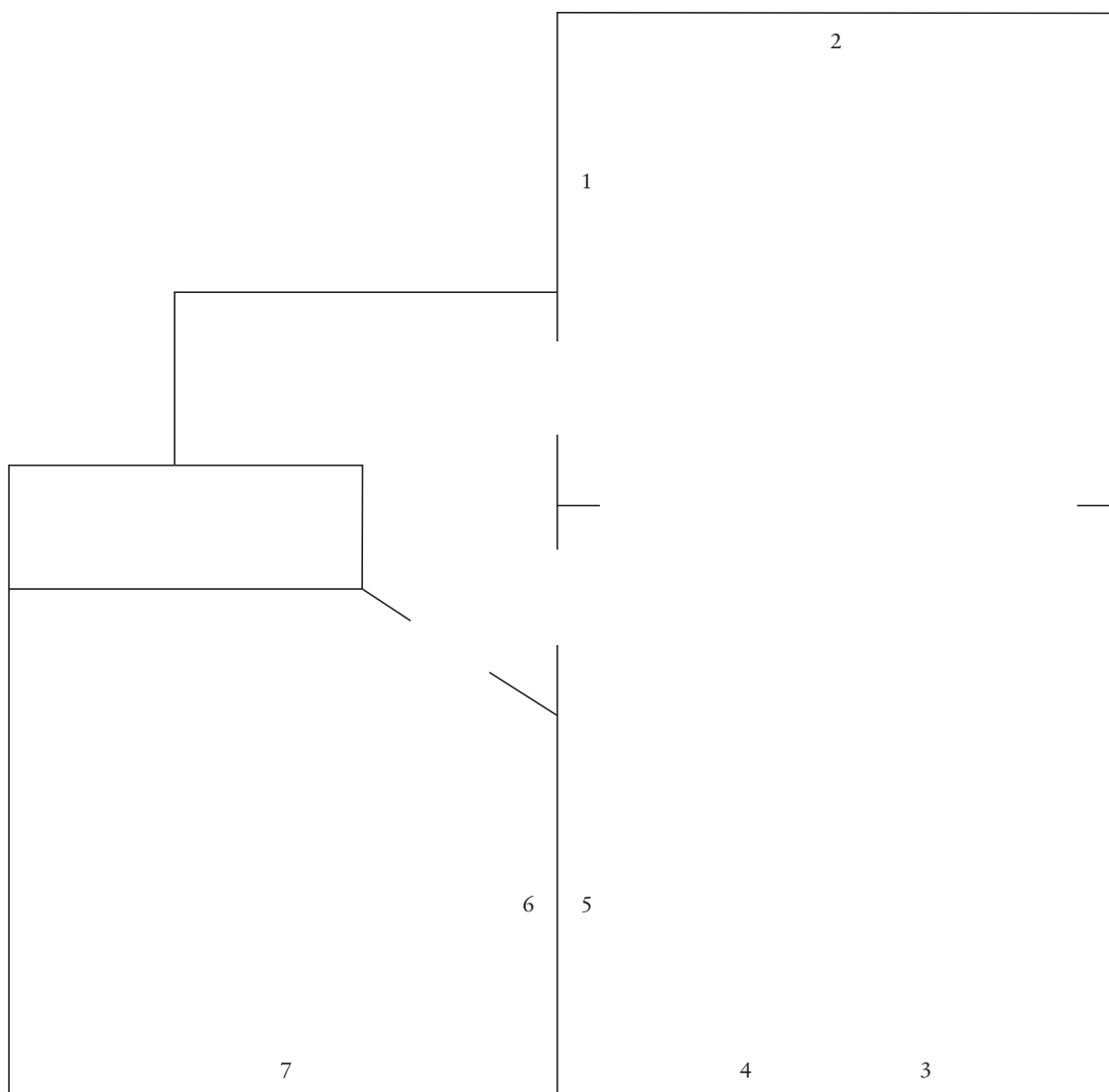
5 October–9 November 2024

The title for Emma Rose Schwartz's solo exhibition, 'Old Mortality', is taken from writer Katherine Anne Porter's short novel of the same name. The three-part story examines the compression of a familial history through the voices of two Texan sisters, as they process their shared lineage.

Having grown up in Nashville, Schwartz's relationship to her own past subtly finds its way into the paintings. The houses which populate the scenes reference the ranch-style architecture she was accustomed to seeing as a child in the American South. Immortalised in paint, they situate the protagonists, who Schwartz notes are 'fractals' of herself – merged with various imagery sourced from art history, pop culture, literature, cartoons and family photographs. Instead of viewing these works as nostalgic, she recognises origin and autobiography as useful tools for investigation.

Schwartz's textural application stems from an appreciation for *pentimento* – an Italian term in which ghosts of earlier decisions reappear through veils of paint. She'll wash away layers to reveal the initial markings in Conté or charcoal, but never diminish their history. Painter Philip Guston wrote that a painting is only deemed complete 'when it feels not new but old', and more recently Amy Sillman, preached that reworking, or destroying a canvas is 'very much like a way of thinking'. For Schwartz, the success of a painting is shaped by their continually evolving nature. Rarely using brushes, instead preferring her gloved fingers, rubber erasers, knives and rags; she embraces every layer like a fossilised remain, peeling, scraping, carving in order to reveal their recent past.

To avoid the confinement of a frame, each canvas is pinned directly to Schwartz's studio walls. The fabric is then respondent to her studio upon making, absorbing remnants of chalk dust, powdered pigments and studio debris. The term 'old mortality' in Porter's story is taken from a gravestone poem – in its context, the expression is used to suggest that the burden of being mortal is only relieved in death. Schwartz relates the parameters of mortality to the definition of painting, it is defined by its edges and endpoints – while simultaneously trying to escape these restrictions. Hanging loosely on the wall, the canvases are alive and freed, until she puts her tools away and allows another layer to dry – the resulting image becoming locked forever.



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| 1 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Oddly Sweet</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
20×25 cm | 4 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Certain Planet</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
152×45 cm | 6 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Out Front</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on linen
152×91 cm |
| 2 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>TV Sunrise</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
147×243 cm | 5 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Middle Creek</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
132×127 cm | 7 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Old Mortality</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
157×154 cm |
| 3 | Emma Rose Schwartz
<i>Fortunate Relative</i> , 2024
Oil, paper, Conté, charcoal, chalk
pastel and graphite on canvas
152×45 cm | | | | |