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GRETCHEN SCHERER Composite Interior Painter

Gretchen Scherer was in the inaugural exhibition for Equity Gallery, **2015:1947**, with her response to Artists Equity member Morris Kantor's work. She is represented by Art3 Gallery, and will be having a solo show in May of 2017.

Scherer recently went to Rome for the opening of a new show she is part of, "Postcard from New York-Part 1" at Anna Marra Contemporanea. She identified with Rome in that a lot of her paintings start off as collages and she found that Rome's art is made from recycled art as well. She finds pictures for her collages from old books from Strand Bookstore.



"Castle Howard," oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 2016.
Image courtesy of Art3 Gallery

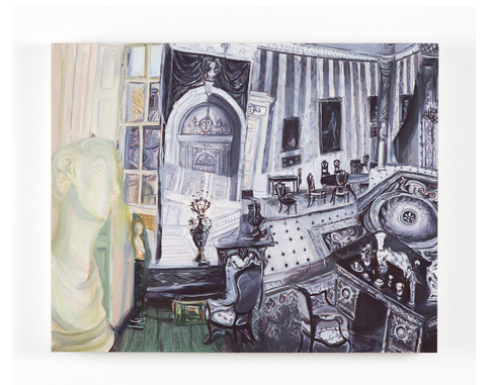
Why are you interested in composite images? How did you get to collaging?

It was sort of a circuitous process. I guess collage has always been there but it wasn't as prominent. Before, I was painting spaces from my life in large scale, almost life size, and I was collaging them on the wall to make a big mural, with images from my day or my life. Looking back that was really crazy, because it was so big! I did that for a long time, and then I made this really big house that was made up of little tiny pieces of paper. The front was a huge façade of the house, with doors and windows. As you walked through, you saw all the inside of the house, for example a lamp, a couch or a table, all created from paper, flat, some were 3D, all were hanging from the ceiling. After, I decided just to paint, on canvas or on panel, but I didn't know what I wanted to paint. It took a while. I was mostly painting interiors, some landscape and still life, but it was all very straightforward. Then one day, I found one of these books (Strand books of Roman architecture). I started painting the old interiors from my books and then a friend of mine gave me the same book that I had as a Christmas present. At first I was like "Oh I have the same book!" And then I took it and saw that I essentially had a duplicate. I looked at those photos and thought "What if I expanded the space or if I added onto it," and it just like took a life on its own.

Gretchen doesn't like reading too much about the places that she cuts out from the books, because she sees cutting as an act of violence. Instead, she just looks for what parts she needs in her collage (for example she looks for staircases).

What ignited an interest in the interior?

I feel like interiors are very psychological and it speaks about the subconscious, dreams, and other worlds. I have these recurring dreams that I am stuck in an elaborate interior space, very similar to these, and I can't get out. So the paintings are sort of about that, but not only just about the dreams. But, it took me a while to realize that this kind of looks like the dream I always have! So I work very intuitively and I let the outside work its way in, but my dreams



definitely have influenced me. Since I've been back from Rome, I've been dreaming that I've been in this corridor, with all the arches and stones, so I'm sort of trying to figure out whether this [collage] is like my dream.

"The Secret of the Old Bust," oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 2016. Image courtesy of Art3 Gallery

She is currently working on multiple paintings at a time, going from collage, to watercolor sketch (two full workdays to finish), to painting on panels. The paintings are very thinly layered, and she has done a lot of paintings in monochromatic tone with ultramarine blue. She is trying to figure out how to work more colors (as original to the pictures she cuts out) into her compositions.

Why/how did you choose the ultramarine you use?

An artist's palette is definitely influenced by schooling. I went to the Art Institute of Chicago for undergrad, for a year, and they taught me how to set up my palette and honestly it hasn't changed that much, and I'll try to introduce new colors and it feels weird. I think it's that and also how a color makes you feel. Ultramarine to me, I resonate more with than a phthalo blue. I'm very much a creature of habit, and it gets me through!

What would you say is the hardest part about being an artist?

I would say the discipline. I am very strict with myself; I almost have tunnel vision, as the work is so detailed and labor intensive. I keep a schedule which includes notes and descriptions of every painting, drawing or collage; what I do each day; and how many hours I spend. I use it to keep me on track as my work takes an intense amount of focus and I can't afford to get distracted. So, my life is pretty small, I like it that way but not much else can fit in. It [painting] just takes up so much time!



"The Hidden Door," oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 2016. Image courtesy of Art3 Gallery

How do you disperse knowledge about your art using social media and the internet?

Instagram has been amazing for me because I'm really shy. I really had a hard time out of grad school talking about my art, so it gives me a way to share my art with people but also a way not to talk to them directly. I love sharing it and seeing how people react and I think it's amazing. I almost only put art on my Instagram for that reason. But also sometimes it feels a little weird, where I don't feel like I want to keep Instagramming my work, but I almost feel like I have to do it as part of what one does as an artist these days. Maybe that's just the shyness, but once I do Instagram my work and I get a positive response, I realize and see that, oh this is nice! It's another way to get out of your shell.

What would you suggest to an artist who is just starting out?

For me, the hardest part is the discipline. So if you maintain a schedule, whether or not you have a show coming, so that when you get a deadline, you can be like "Alright, I can do this!" You never want to go through a fallow period where you are not making art. Even if you're making bad art--this is what helped me to survive! I continued making art even when nobody wanted to look at it, nobody cared. It was hard; there was a long time where I felt like, is anybody looking? But then but slowly, you start to find your voice. It takes a long time I feel, so if you need to be alone for a time, that's okay too. I feel like now, things are so market driven. Basing your art on that is almost unhealthy. So if you need to, you can go into a "cave", that is what I did for years, until you find yourself. Once you're actually out there, it is a lot of pressure, and you don't want to have a lot of pressure when you don't know who you really are yet.

How can artists help other artists? In a world that is market driven, it is hard to be able to paint what is true to what you want to paint.

I have a handful of really close friends, one I've known since high school who is a professional artist, another I've known for 8-10 years. Whenever I'm worried about something or have a question, I just call them and ask them what do you think, have you been through this before. Sometimes, if one of us is really stressed out with a deadline or something like that, we just call each other every day to just check in and talk about how we are feeling. Just to help each other, I think that these friendships, connections, studio visits, sharing what you're getting from their art with them is really important and valuable. We definitely do studio visits, go to museums together, to shows together, talk about ideas, and try to keep it on the art and not just the other stuff.



"To the Poets," oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches, 2016. Image courtesy of Art3 Gallery

Which artist inspires you the most? Which artistic figure do you identify with?

Since I just got back from Rome, my mind is constantly on Michelangelo, who I don't think I'm anything like at all -- I wish! I fell in love with the Sistine Chapel. It actually brought me to tears; I think it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. He wasn't really a painter, more of a sculptor, but to me the whole Sistine Chapel is really a monument to painting. On the side walls, there are pieces done by a lot of his teachers and other artists, and Michelangelo does the ceiling and the main altarpiece. So to me, I saw it as: as the teachers are lifting up the student, the student excels way further than you can imagine. It was so moving to me. Every single part of the chapel is painted, there is hardly any sculpture, so I really saw it as a story of painting. It changed me!

In Rome, there is so much art, and art and life are so mixed together, in a way that I feel that artists really gave their whole selves when they painted. That is something that I want to do in my work, and I feel that it is not so much a contemporary value anymore, of like giving yourself. I always want people to feel when they look at my work, "She really gave us everything she could, she poured out everything she had, she didn't hold back."

What's a typical day like in the studio? In general, what % of time do you spend making v. planning v. website/social media v. applying for grants?

I would say I'm very heavy on the painting side, and everything else is pretty minimal. I think it is because my work is so labor intensive. I do apply for grants and residencies but it's always an issue of whether I really do want to go and whether I have the time. I've only been on three but they've all been really amazing. I guess most of the time I'm working in the studio. Typical day: Usually I get here by 10 and work until at least 6. I actually live close by, so I'll have dinner, then come back and work for at least 2 more hours. This all depends if I have a deadline. Each painting takes about 80 hours, and they are very thin layers, so they have to dry as well. So if I have a deadline, I'm like "I have to work 24 hours a day," because I can't speed up the process--it just takes that long. So I try to get ahead of myself. If I keep 8 hours a day at least, Monday through Friday, then it's okay, I have something going. If I have a deadline, I have to sometimes work more than that.

Interviewed by Sarah Cho

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