

Art Review: Arlene Bujese Offers “Dealer’s Choice” at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts

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by Erica-Lynn Huberty

Group shows can offer viewers one or more commonalities: shared themes, size of work, range of color, and more. In the case of “Dealer’s Choice,” the group show on view at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, the commonality is the curator: Arlene Bujese.

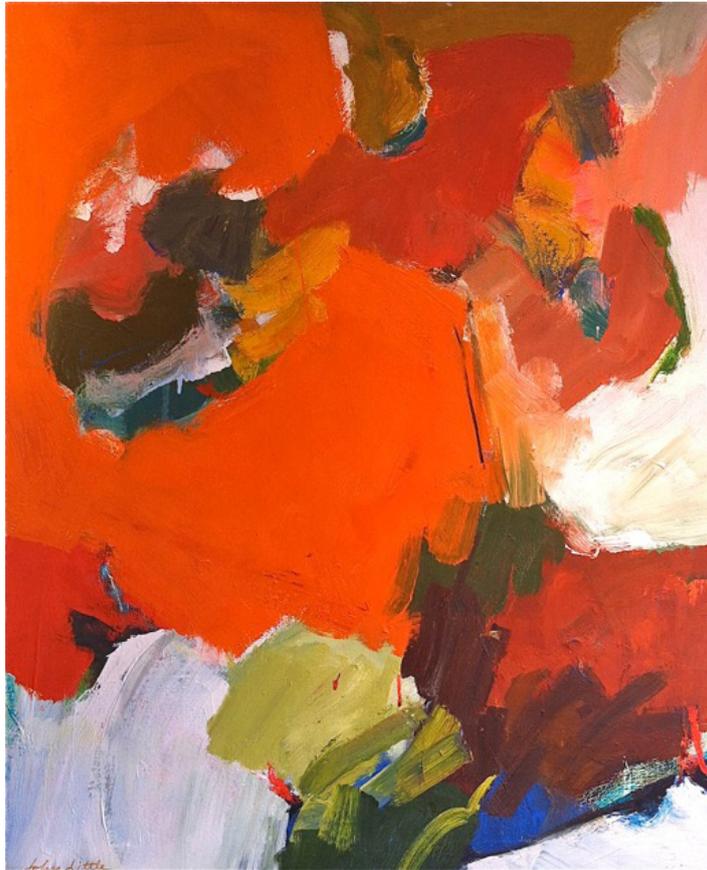
Ms. Bujese was a prominent figure in the art scene of the 1970s-1990s in the Hamptons, owning her own gallery in East Hampton and representing the likes of Elaine de Kooning and John Little. For the past three years, she has been curator-in-residence at the Southampton Cultural Center in Southampton Village, NY.

When an exhibit’s content is based on one person’s private collection, the person is often one of historic significance—or the collection itself one of significance—enabling the viewer to garner a wealth of information that is aesthetic and contextual, as well as socio-political and historical. One can form an opinion of the collector him/herself, or the era in which that person lived and collected.

A show mounted by a contemporary, living curator that nods at his or her own past history as a gallerist must therefore offer up something for the viewer who asks: Why do I care? At Kathryn Markel, Bujese succeeds in an aesthetic vein, but also in a purely local context. It is a show about a gallerist who embodies the memory of a bygone era of art in the Hamptons, and anyone who was present and working in the arts during that time will be warmed to see it.

The content of “Dealer’s Choice” runs the gamut, from the mid-century Cubist work of Calvin Albert and the late Abstract Expressionist paintings of Elaine de Kooning, to the decorative contemporary paintings of Stephanie Brody-Lederman and mixed media work of Darlene Charneco. And while the exhibition space at Kathryn Markel is small, it is light-filled and the works chosen all lend a cheerful—rather than claustrophobic—air.

Also shown alongside works by contemporary artists are paintings made in the 1940s to 1960s by Mary Abbott, Will Barnet, and Arlene Wingate. Heavily-pigmented color links works by newcomer Mary Daunt and John Little, though Daunt’s paintings are primarily straightforward landscapes and still lifes, while Little’s are steeped in his unique and abstract gestural language.



“Bostwick” by John Little, 1966. Oil on linen, 34 x 28 inches.

There is a danger in hanging such vastly disparate works together, in that their differences run the risk of not being reconciled by color alone, but exaggerated instead. From a curatorial point of view, this does both artists, and indeed the viewer, a disservice.

Better is the counterpoint in the window of the gallery of William King’s cool, steel silhouette sculpture *Us* installed with Elaine de Kooning’s balmy, lush oil painting *Red Oxide Grotto*. Or the prickly, pigmented nails of Darlene Charneco’s *Forest Reading* and the precisely scratchy textures and whimsical bird of Brody-Lederman’s *A Valise Without Handles*.



"Red Oxide Grotto" by Elaine de Kooning, 1988. Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Below is "US" by William King, c. late-1990s. Stainless steel, Ed. of 10.

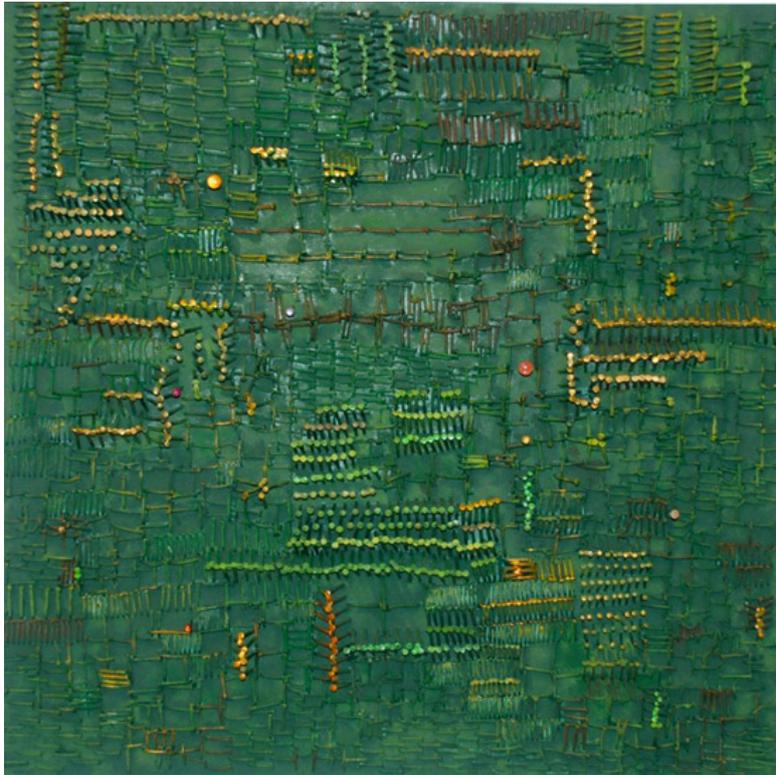


“A Valise Without Handles” by Stephanie Brody-Lederman, 2013. Mixed media.

Incongruous yet appealing best describes “Dealer’s Choice,” with most of the works showcased displaying technical merit and significant content. Mostly, this show represents an era when art in the Hamptons was linked to those who lived, worked, and showed locally, those artists often alluding to their love of the light and sea or referencing them outright.

These days, with the burgeoning number of artists as well as galleries linked to a larger, more universal art market, the focus has shifted away from work purely about place. Instead, viewers are confronted with varying kinds of visual art, much of it rooted in some form of conceptualism, made by artists who “happen” to live in the Hamptons.

There is something, therefore, both comforting and unnerving in the nostalgia of the Bujese show, and that conflict alone is worth a look.



“Forest Reading” by Darlene Charneco, 2013. Mixed media,
24 x 24 inches.

BASIC FACTS: “Dealer’s Choice” will remain on view through Feb. 2. Kathryn Markel Fine Arts is located at 2418 Montauk Hwy., Bridgehampton, NY 11932 . Gallery hours are Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. www.markelfinearts.com

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