



ART REVIEW: Artists Respond to Challenge to “Think Red” at Janet Lehr Gallery

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by Kelcey Edwards

Challenged by gallery owner Janet Lehr to “Think Red,” the living artists with work on view in the “Valentine & Art: Together Forever” exhibition at [Janet Lehr Fine Arts](#) responded with breathtaking results.

While there are many artists featured in the East Hampton, NY gallery show—including Pipi Deer, Bert Stern, David Demers, Adam Handler, Ron Agam, Haim Mizrahi, Colin Christian, Christopher Deeton, and Shimon Okshteyn (to name a few)—the exhibition is more than the sum of its parts. Immediately upon entering the gallery, the viewer is immersed in an environment thick with seductions of various kinds.

To the right of the entrance is a wall filled with works by [Pipi Deer](#), a New York City based artist originally from Seattle whose photography spans a variety of techniques, equipment and materials: Polaroid, Lomo, Diana, Holga, Leica M8, cell phone, underwater disposable camera and Super 8 film. Her work is emotive and stark, depicting what she describes as “inner states.”



“red rose #3 (bridge)” by Pipi Deer, 2002. C Print, 4 x 6 inches. Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

The series on view at Janet Lehr Fine Arts features provocative self portraits and still lifes of such commonplace objects as a nightgown, a lamp and a rose. Her images convey a sense of timelessness, as though they could depict scenes from a brothel in an abandoned mining town as readily as an artist’s loft in Brooklyn, and often feature a thick, red X loosely painted over the composition.

Nestled between her display of photographs is a wall of [Christopher Deeton](#)’s poured paintings, in clear dialogue with such American masters as [Morris Lewis](#) and [Robert Motherwell](#). Throughout the gallery, Deeton’s Rorschach-esque paintings represent a seduction of another kind: the seduction of the materials themselves. The stroke-less, “flat” surface look of his poured paint invites the viewer to consider the place and time that the paint dried and found its way from the vessel to the end

composition, a dimension that feels—much like love itself—at once spontaneous and inevitable.

On the left wall of the front gallery—and again in a room off of the back gallery that reads at first glance as a storage room—[Adam Handler](#) brings a tone of playful levity to the exhibition with his large oil paintings featuring female characters. Accompanying this reviewer on a walk through the gallery, Lehr referred to Handler as her protégé.

“I discovered him when he was only 21,” she said, noting, like a proud parent, that in college he studied art history rather than studio art, “because he was already a painter.” Throughout Handler’s paintings in this series, the muse smirks back at the artist, as in *Bessie*, where, Lehr observed, the character seems to be announcing the surprising fact of her existence. “Look at her,” the gallery owner said, smiling. “It’s like she’s saying, ‘Hello. I’m here. Let’s play.’”



“Bessie” by Adam Handler, 2012. Acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 70 x 50 inches. Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

Similarly enticing is the nude subject of [Sally Mann](#)’s silverprint *Jessie*, in which the artist’s daughter is poised defiantly on a precipice, making viewers feel keenly aware of their own unreciprocated gaze.

In the context of the show, even [Ron Agam](#)’s C print with resin, *Orchid*, seems coy. “Can you imagine anything sexier than that orchid?” Lehr mused, before whispering that she had to fight to get the artist’s permission to exhibit the print. Having framed the work in a very expensive frame, she said, “he didn’t want it to leave his house.”



“Orchid” by Ron Agam. C Print with resin, 30 x 30 inches. Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

There are many stars of the show, including the curation. Even [Bert Stern](#)’s Marilyns are leaning against the wall as gracefully and effortlessly as one might imagine Monroe would have done had she been there herself. The middle section of the gallery is filled with a variety of unexpected gems, including playful and sensual artwork by masters ranging from the aforementioned Sally Mann to [Man Ray](#) and [Pablo Picasso](#).

Tucked away in the back galleries are some of the exhibition’s greatest showstoppers, including a mesmerizing painting by Ukraine-born [Shimon Okshteyn](#); two red-drip paintings by Israeli-born,

East Hampton-based poet, musician and painter [Haim Mizrahi](#); and an abstract painting by another East End musician and artist, [David Demers](#).



“Garden Nymph” by Shimon Okshteyn. 90 x 72 inches.
Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

Demers, known for his large, abstract paintings of soothing forms, was so inspired when Lehr suggested he “think Red” that he slipped away from the table during the gallery owner’s visit to his home, texting her an image two hours later of the “bones” of his new, emotive “Red Series,” a brightly-colored continuation of his lyrical explorations. Mizrahi’s layered drip paintings also seem to draw from his sensibilities as a musician. During a visit to the gallery, the artist spoke about his need to alternate between his primary modes of expression—painting, poetry and drumming—in order to “work things out.”



“Love is in the Air I” by David Demers, 2018. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

Seeing Mizrahi and Demers, the two musician/painters, exhibited alongside one another, the net effect is not just musical: it is the structured lyricism of a punk rock love ballad. Mizrahi will also be exhibiting at Ashawagh Hall in Springs, NY later this month, with an opening reception scheduled for March 17, 2018.



“Love Me Tender III” by Haim Mizrahi, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 40 inches. Courtesy of Janet Lehr Fine Arts.

A final treat anchored in the corners of the back gallery is a series of oil paintings by [Adam Umbach](#), works that flirt with wistful nostalgia, painted with a technique and luminosity that draws inspiration from such varied artists as [Gerhard Richter](#) and [Dan Flavin](#).

Wandering back through the galleries, I was struck by the the fact that there is more humor than pathos in the show, which in some ways seems like a send-up of many of the saccharine tropes one might associate with Valentine's Day: Flowers. The Color Red. Seduction. Love. I asked Lehr about this observation before leaving. "To curate a show like this," she said with a Cheshire cat grin, "you have to have imagination."

BASIC FACTS: "Valentine & Art: Together Forever" is on view February 17 through March 28, 2018 at Janet Lehr Fine Arts, 68 Park Place, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.janetlehrfineart.com.

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