

Art

The mesmerizing (un)painting of Marthe Keller

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KUTZTOWN — To discuss the paintings of Marthe Keller, one would need to approach the qualities of order, process and material, not necessarily in that order but definitely in that realm. Her paintings

place complete gestures next to and congruent with the gestures made before or those sitting underneath, and her approach to nonrepresentational abstraction is one of patient observation and singular presence.

Keller is the New Arts Program choice for this year's resident artist. Her works are being shown at the program's main space in Kutztown and recently at Northampton Community College's hallway gallery. The exhibit at NCC having been completed, we will cover her work being shown through May 7 at the Kutztown location.

The title of the series is called "My Life in the Wake, or Tobecontinued's Tale (FW 626:19)." The artist was highly impressed with "Finnegan's Wake," the famous but very difficult novel by James Joyce, in which the author discusses the circularity of life and its repetitions in a very nonlinear and experimental writing. Keller takes that nonlinear mode as archetypal for her means of production, going so far as to even reference the page and line she found most significant to her art.

Looking at her work one sees a resounding simplicity of vertical brush strokes amid a closely valued color scheme of grays and ambers. The show consists of 10 pieces, the majority done in acrylics on panels or canvas, with



Artist Marthe Keller in front of her painting, "It was not midnight, it was not raining."

If you go

The New Arts Program is located at 173 W. Main St., Kutztown. Call 610-683-6440 or visit www.napconnection.com for hours and additional information.

one etching and one mixed-medium piece titled "Dressy." This work is composed of netting, vinyl and stitched tape painted with acrylics and hung loosely in two or three layers on grommets.

All have a coarse, deceptively unrefined appearance, some with threads dangling

from frayed edges, intentionally left behind by the artist. For the work titled "It was not midnight, it was not raining," tan, yellow and gray lines run down the surface of the canvas, seemingly in contradiction to the title yet ironic to its deliberate ambiguity and unfussy appearance.

This rough straightforwardness belies a deeper need to find an honest gesture that is uninflected by anything taught or influenced. A classically trained artist, she is well traveled and associated with many prominent artists of the New York school, yet her goals are closely aligned

to her contemplated relationship with the brush stroke.

She said in a statement, "My reiterated motif is the paint stroke and the many ways its meaning is revised by my physical idiosyncrasies, like steady breathing interrupted by a hiccup."

She uses the word *desistance* to describe her method of (un)painting and relies on awkward tools such as a fence painting handle that can grip four or more large brushes at once, and on chance situations such as an imprint left behind from an earlier painting.

"I like the Italian term *avan-*



"Dressy," by Marthe Keller

zi better than *leftover*," she said. "Avanzi looks forward, advancing to the next meal."

Keller has been exhibiting worldwide since 1974, with shows regularly taking place in Brooklyn, N.Y. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the British Museum, the San Francisco MMA and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others.

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