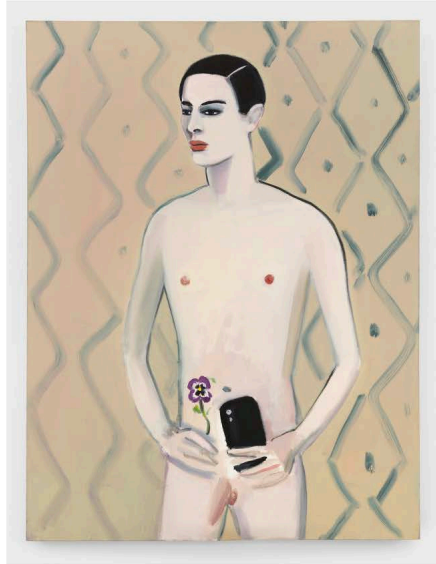


CHEIM & READ

ARTFORUM



Maureen Dougherty, *Young Asian with Pansy and iPhone*, 2023, oil on canvas, 48 x 36".

NEW YORK

Maureen Dougherty

CHEIM & READ | CHELSEA

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While Maureen Dougherty is mostly known as an abstractionist, she studied figurative painting, and has returned to it time and again throughout her career. And when the Covid-19 lockdown isolated her in Pittsfield, Massachusetts for two years, the figure came back prominently to the fore, as we see in “Borrowed Time,” the artist’s exhibition here. The majority of the canvases are portraits and *fêtes galantes*, whose subjects possess the appropriately worshipful and hopeless gaze of Watteau’s dancers, his *commedia dell’arte* stock characters, his courtly lovers enveloped in the

haziest *sfumato*, and that other *fêtes galantes* look (altogether more carnal and deliberately, inappropriately, knowing), with scenes and scenarios calling to mind Marcantonio Raimondi’s erotic illustrations for Pietro Aretino to the Marquis de Sade’s less radical, more “workably” *porno confrères*, such as Restif de la Bretonne. All dirty pictures, all agreeably social.

Dougherty presents various episodes from a certain *philosophie dans le boudoir* that are pery in their exquisite modesty: Take *Young Asian with Pansy and iPhone*, 2023, a nude figure of indeterminate sexual orientation and gender presentation. Their *membrum virile* looks rather shy. Where’s my wrap?, the subject seems to inquire—the work’s *pentimenti* and painterly mist provides one. Dougherty has remarked that the background for this painting is quite different from my particular extrapolation, as it is based on an incident of anti-Asian hatred she witnessed on the New York subway. Her bizarrely aestheticized take on such violence imbues the composition’s softness with more than a touch of evil—its perfumes are unmistakably sour, poisoned.

These preponderantly French-y references are very much pointed: the artist’s greater program both in “formal gestures” and iconography is redolently, resolutely Francophile: Matisse reigns supreme in Dougherty’s referential aerie, along with Bonnard’s decaying nudes in the bathtub, Marie Laurencin’s most intimate friends and, across the Atlantic, Walt Kuhn’s circus people and Alex Katz’s urbane milieu. The artist’s perverse figuration is decidedly Gustonesque, but it’s articulated with a frillier version of his Grand Guignol.

— David Rimanelli