

► CRITICISM

Wednesday, April 15th, 2015

## Resplendent: Judith Simonian at Edward Thorp

by Deborah Garwood

***Judith Simonian: Foreign Bodies, Recent Paintings at Edward Thorp Gallery***

March 12 to April 18, 2015

210 Tenth Avenue, 6th Floor (between 24th and 25th streets)

New York City, 212 691 6565



Judith Simonian, *Snow Cone*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 46 x 64 inches. Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery

In her resplendent second solo show with Edward Thorp, of paintings made in the last two years, Judith Simonian demonstrates a genius for color, texture, and the exploration of spatial conundrums. Twenty canvases, worked in acrylic, range in size from a mere eight by ten inches to as much as six foot by five with subject matter that cycles between categories of comparable breadth. There are what I'd describe as optical-illusion still lifes, domestic interiors, travel theme — on earth and in space, and nature studies. It's a roomy, mixed bag of themes.

In *Snow Cone* (2014), a good-sized work at 46 x 64 inches, figure-ground elements add up to the representational suggestion of a cake wedge — an illusion enhanced by a bright triangle of frosting at image center, behind which a brightly hued, roughly textured yellow background seems to throw the cake's decorated layers, and the lower third of the painting, into shadow. The pedestal of a cake stand can also be discerned, where its elliptical silver platter appears to hover over a tabletop. This metaphor of the cake wedge simultaneously alludes to "slicing" and "layers," terms familiar to most anyone who works with imagery in the online environment. In the physical studio, Simonian often employs collage, in techniques where "slicing" and "layers" are quite literal.

Collage can be seen to contribute to the optical illusions of *Fruit on Blue Table* (2013). Both paintings, along with others such as *In the Rapids* and *Red Fish Bowl*, while accomplished works in themselves, come across as studies where the artist hones her craft for more ambitious undertakings, such, for instance, as *Patio Lounge Chairs* (2014), a gorgeous tour-de-force of abstraction and illusion. A deep pool where goldfish swim dominates the foreground, while the eponymous chairs, in brilliant vermilion, there are almost hidden behind a black umbrella, which decently shields from view a couple enjoying the tropical ambience of a summer afternoon. The evocation of plant life, a humid atmosphere, and a cooling body of water all induce the viewer to read much more into the painter's marks than might actually be there.

"Fleshy Pink Room" (2014) is a six-foot-high painting whose lighting effects, layering, and pink and green tones bring to my mind the mannerist master Jacopo Pontormo. A forbidding foreground barrier keeps us from walking straight in; instead, we must find a way to float over a lime green tongue in its groove on our way to the room's pink flesh, as it basks in the glow of a far blue entryway. This painting exemplifies Simonian's well-justified reputation as an intuitive painter. To quote from the press release, the artist enjoys turning "colorful scraps of trash" into pictorial compositions that approach "near collapse." In fact, the bombardment of sensory data that we continuously take in from the world

would collapse us without the mind's capacity to knit it together. Simonian's paintings suggest the contradictory resilience and fallibility of this process. In so doing, they knit luscious pictorial fields that tease cognition, along with the senses.



Judith Simonian, *Fleshly Pink Room*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60-1/4 inches. Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery