

Dorothy Iannone
 "My Heroine and Her Mate"

Peres Projects, Berlin
 17.1. – 7.3.2015

E Those who have associated the work of artist Dorothy Iannone (*1933 in Boston) with a graphic, figural, genital, and declarative liberation of the male and female erotic nude might well be surprised by this exhibition of her early oil paintings. The seven canvases presented here do not quite conform to what has become Iannone's signature style: vibrant, anatomical, planar, illustrative, outspoken, and shot through with explicit eroticism. In the wake of a resurgence of interest in Iannone's work before and after her inclusion in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, a number of retrospective exhibitions in the past few years have reinforced this signature, which first emerged in the mid-to-late 60s and was sustained throughout the majority of Iannone's practice. The painter here on display – who has not yet come into her own – is, rather, attuned to historical painting traditions, to a studious interest in primitivism and archetypal iconography, and to an uncertain, though intriguing, alternation between figuration and abstraction.

The seven canvases in the exhibition date from 1962 to 1964 and were made in the US, predating Iannone's artistic-erotic partnership with Dieter Roth; her crucial experience of censorship from the 1969 exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern; her life in Iceland; and her move to Berlin (where she has resided since 1976). The works exhibit productive strains between the lush, graphic iconographical style she was to develop (which owed as much to Pop as to political signage and illustrative techniques such as the chunky back outline), an interest in folkloric iconography, feminism, and the later practitioners of Abstract Expressionism in America.

There is scarcely any body in these canvases, which are vigorous, vivid, and rich. The flat, rhythmical blobs, forms, and molting patches of color are vestigially transmuted to Iannone's later works, although here, too, an inspection of details reveals figurative elements: eyes, teeth, berries, bouquets of flowers. *Signs of Love* (1963) looks like a hellish, saturated, primary-colour primitivism, with nods to folksy and psychedelic references (discordant colors, a mouth eating what appears to be a small figurine-like couple). Insofar as Iannone's quasi-abstractions harken back to AbEx traditions, it's not the muted, broad strokes of Helen Frankenthaler, nor the scurrying organics of Joan Mitchell, but something more like the fragmented, rhythmic, patchwork geometry of Hans Hofmann (Hofmann having been Roth's tutor, for a time, in Provincetown, where Roth and Iannone met).

The exhibition is more significant for what it excludes; an exclusion which correctively frames the genesis of Iannone's style. It thus gives historical weight and documentary accuracy to a significant artist whose recognition has been somewhat belated. The title "My Heroine and My Mate" was, perhaps, less apt for this grouping of good, if sometimes uneven and not wholly original works. *Secret Blossom* – to take the title from a 1962 painting on display – may have been more fitting: the show is a secret blossom, indeed.

Pablo Larios



My Heroine and
 Her Mate, 1962
 Oil, paper
 collage, acrylic
 on canvas
 164 x 151 cm



Turquoise
 Delight, 1963
 Oil, paper
 collage, acrylic
 on canvas
 178 x 153 cm

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Installation views
 "My Heroine
 and Her Mate",
 Peres Projects,
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