

September 12, 2006 - SFist Conquers 49 Geary



Last week, we headed down to 49 Geary to brave the throngs of art school hipsters and wealthy collectors for a glimpse of the first fall season openings. We were armed with sharp elbows and cheap wine and despite the massive crowds preventing us making any kind of smooth transition from gallery to gallery, we managed to catalogue the best shows for you (aren't we sweet?). And trust us, there was some [serious crap](#) out there.

Catharine Clark Gallery It was hard not to be completely in awe of [Julie Heffernan's](#) show at the [Catharine Clark Gallery](#). It's been awhile since we've seen an artist with the guts to try their hand at [Baroque](#)-style painting while maintaining their own unique sensibilities and manage to pull it off with such astounding success. Heffernan does so effortlessly, creating a world of opulence, grace, playfulness and light.

Sometimes called a contemporary [surrealist](#), Heffernan falls upon the imagery in her dreams to populate the interior spaces of her compositions which often refer to grand ballrooms and ornate drawing rooms, while her figures are weighted by fantastical costumes overwrought with flora and fauna. As a result of drawing so directly from the narratives of her subconscious, Heffernan considers each work a kind of self-portrait.

Heffernan's allegorical paintings are filled with fairies, foliage, creatures of all kinds and her meticulous compositions borrow from the grand historical styles of still life, portraiture and landscape. In *Self-Portrait as Tender Mercenary* she engages the viewer with her narrative appeal by overflowing the pictorial surface with an abundance of visual richness. The figure is bathed in an ethereal light while cascades of crystals drape around her head and shoulders. She holds golden strands which harness a myriad of wild animals, including lions and elephants, themselves graceful beings. In the background we see soldiers at war, again referencing a Baroque motif of heroic battles.

The self-portraits are not literal; the symbolic references are a means to examine issues deeply personal and important to her such as feminism, gender, motherhood and class structure. We only wish our dreams were as profound and luxurious as Julie Heffernan's (although we imagine [Siegfried & Roy's](#) come close). This show is not to be missed, however skip the mediocre work by [Lincoln Schatz](#) in the Video Project Room. Yawn.

SFist Shelley, contributing

Image: Self-Portrait as Tender Mercenary, oil on canvas, Julie Heffernan