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## Sarah Letovsky: Girls Girls Girls at Project Gallery

*Girls Girls Girls* – the name hooked me in before I saw any of the works. A neon sign flashing this word thrice repeated in the window of Project Gallery lures me in to its quaint space. The opening was a sweltering night at the end of Toronto’s summer but I think it was all the *Girls* that were bringing in the heat.



Sarah Letovsky at the Opening Reception in front of her painting, *Bernadette*, 2016, oil on canvas, 60” x 72”. Photo: Carter Brown

Sarah Letovsky, just two years after her graduation from OCAD, brings a bevy of painted ladies to the Queen East space for her very first solo exhibition. Upon entering the gallery I was greeted by bold and vivid canvases on the walls. As a person who is drawn to the boldest and brightest of patterns and colours, my eyes were in heaven. Paintings on various sizes of canvas are scattered throughout the gallery along with a wall of smaller watercolours. Before even focusing in on one work at a time, the exhibition as a whole is absolutely striking. I know there’s no way I could have passed by without stopping in if I looked in from the street. There’s intensity in each painting, from the brilliant colours and solo female girls staring out at the viewers.



Installation view with Sarah Letovsky, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on canvas, 24” x 24” (left) and *Red Striped Shirt*, 2016, oil on canvas, 30” x 30”(right). Photo: Carter Brown

Letovsky’s pieces are beautiful and complex; I was drawn in instantly. The artist told me that female portraits have been something she has always loved, they even were the subject of her thesis. As I talked to Sarah Letovsky, she also explained to me how her *Girls* in the exhibition are abstract characters, compared to her earlier works, which were more representational. These women may start from just a gesture or colour, which the artist then builds into a face and personality. Even if one of Sarah’s faces has a story that she has created, the creator does not wish to impose this on the viewer; so we, the viewers, are able to create our own narrative. Letovsky told me, “We are always looking at faces. We are trained to pick up the smallest gestures or nuances, so even just the tiny little movement of the mouth or eye can totally change the expression and feel of the piece so I like to let them do their own thing.” And do their own thing they do.



Sarah Letovsky, 2016, *Salome*, oil on canvas, 30” x 36”. Courtesy of Project Gallery

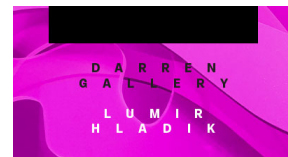
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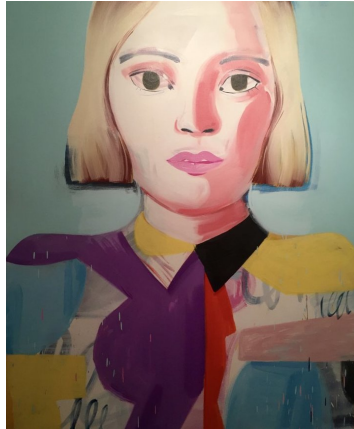


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 Xiaotong Cao

As I moved through the exhibition and slowly got to know the *Girls*, it hits me just how much an expression can...express. These faces are nonrepresentational; but even if a real acquaintance or recognizable public figure was the origin of these characters, there is so much information transmitted through their faces that is based on the viewer's personal understanding. When I sit and stare at the face staring back at me, a story comes to life based on my experiences. I am reminded of my younger sister, that shy girl from a university lecture, and I also see traits of myself. Certain elements of expressions really resonate with emotions I have felt; and those emotions transferred to the narrative I created. I discovered how much the human face can communicate.



Sarah Letovsky, *Virgo*, 2016, oil on canvas, 48" x 60". Photo: Carter Brown

But faces also conceal. Are these *Girls* trying to hide something by displaying a certain expression to the watching world? Are these expressions a glimpse into raw emotions that are not veiled as a reaction to onlookers? Or do they wear these expressions to protect themselves? I wonder if there are aspects of the narrative that I created in my imagination, which are intentionally conveyed through the painted face by the artist, in order to shield something. Am I fooled by them in believing I understand the particular expression of the face before me? Perhaps I am getting way too Inception-like with the artworks...



Sarah Letovsky, *Still life with Fruit*, 2016, oil on canvas, 30" x 40". Courtesy of Project Gallery

Letovsky's 's stunning first solo exhibition made me reflect on myself, my emotions, and my interactions with other human beings; specifically on the act of viewing and being viewed by others. I was amazed by her brushstrokes even before I was mesmerized by her *Girls* and the characters that came to life through them. One thing is for sure: this girl can paint.

Carter Brown

\*Exhibition information: September 8 – 25, 2016, Project Gallery, 1109 Queen Street East, Toronto. Gallery hours: Wed – Sun 12 – 5 pm.

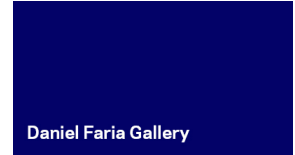


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