

CRITICS' PICKS

CURRENT PAST

New York

- Marjorie Strider
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- Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel
- Pam Lins
- "Pathmakers: Women in Art, Craft and Design, Midcentury and Today"
- Hank Willis Thomas
- Fred W. McDarrah
- Leidy Churchman
- Lucas Samaras
- "The Story of O(00)"
- "America Is Hard to See"
- Arthur Ou
- Lisa Yuskavage
- Max Greis
- Nina Beier
- Erin Shirreff
- Wolfgang Tillmans
- Hito Steyerl
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Los Angeles

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- Julia Heyward
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- Brendan Fowler

Boston

- "Pretty Raw: After and Around Helen Frankenthaler"

Dublin

Sonia Shiel

KEVIN KAVANAGH GALLERY

8 Chancery Ln

April 30–May 30

Sonia Shiel's oil paintings tantalize with hints of unresolved narrative. Even her titles, which are presented in the gallery handout in the form of a poem, are allusive yet ultimately obscure: *honey drips / all quiet / till one day / never rousing* (all works 2015). This conceit is rescued from fey coyness by the strength of Shiel's canvases and the dark elements that haunt her work.

Like many of the works in this exhibition, *birds flee* has a theatricality. A recumbent male figure, dressed like a fairy-tale prince in rich indigo with gold palm tree epaulettes, gazes at an octagonal frame or tray from which a peacock and other smaller birds escape. The perspective is deliberately distorted, and the image seems to reiterate the birds—it feels as though it is about to burst from the edges of the canvas. There's the sense of a proscenium (more pronounced in *aquatics glow, all quiet, and burrows open*), which echoes the deliberate stagey strangeness of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 5*, 1997. In recent years, Shiel has experimented with video and installation, albeit with a more handmade aesthetic than that of Barney, but her paintings remain strongest, and here, alongside three small sculptures, her assured handling of oils really sings.

Shiel teases the metaphor of the stage to conjure the idea of a story, but at the same time she demonstrates the inadequacy of narrative, whether in theater or art, to reveal our whole psychological picture. At a solo show for Volta New York last year, she presented works with a more muted palette of browns and ochers. In this show, her colors—bright reds, yellows, greens, and blues—burst forth in the most comprehensive and impressive exposition of her painting to date.

— Gemma Tipton



View of "Sonia Shiel," 2015.

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