

Derosia

Emma Rose Schwartz
The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism
March 8–May 3, 2025

Derosia is happy to present *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism*, an exhibition of new paintings by Emma Rose Schwartz.

The exhibition draws its title from an eponymous book written by Leah Underhill, one of the infamous Fox sisters known for bringing the American Spiritualist movement into mainstream culture in the mid-19th century. Against this narrative backdrop of conversing with the dead via “table tipping” or the rattling of a bed frame, it seems fitting that Schwartz’s new paintings find her signature childlike and adolescent characters embedded in architectural forms and vernacular furniture: red-headed girls truncated by a wicker chair or tucked away in a coffin-like dresser drawer, or contorted in postures defined by a painting’s border while engaged in acts of comfort or care, like braiding hair. Importantly, their airless surroundings are less illustration of the story than reflection on mortality and the technologies and structures of living that define the ways we quite literally move through the world: a repetition of restricting, resting, recording, remembering as we fill our time and make pictures and language in futile efforts to make things feel permanent.

In this way, you might even say Schwartz’s paintings are rudimentary machines, voids, and mediums themselves—in the sense of being able to communicate with both the living and spirit world, the past and the present. While her rendering style contains elements of whimsy, existing somewhere between children’s fable and Louise Bourgeois’s *Femme Maison* drawings of women’s bodies wearing pictographic houses like heads built by domestic identity, there is nothing fantastical about it. Or legibly contemporary. In the artist’s hands, Andrew Wyeth’s realist allegories of post-War death in the carcass of a black crow compress time with James McNeil Whistler’s symphonies of colorless depictions of young girls in white and creams on canvas such that narrative is also an abstraction. Blurred and scratched and carved into the picture plane as much as it is painted, her iconography also belongs to regional folk traditions, bits of Americana abstracted in the form of a low ranch house or a pack of deer to be hunted as is common in Tennessee where she grew up, revealing the ways the past and inevitable future of endings are always looming.

This isn’t a matter of autobiography nor is image-making for Schwartz a process of therapeutic processing, so much as looking outward to what narratives, or abstractions of a self or culture, both constrain and support us. Although the artist hesitates to stake claims in broader cultural phenomena, her work seems to ask: what is it that delimits our scaffolding? Why do things get trapped or attached to structure, and how can something be trapped in the body, and exist outside of it? Oftentimes, the artist doesn’t realize what a painting is “about” until it’s finished, like a somatic uncovering of a spectral presence that knows something we don’t consciously know—or want to think about—but that guides the way we’re always trying to define or to find the “missing link,” be it the promise of a corporate tech tagline, broken URL, or paradoxical implication of deductive “rational” thought relative to that over which we have no control.

If painting is a medium of origins and endings, about the *edges* of things, Schwartz’s images are superstitions where immaterial belief sketches the outline of existing. “Belief is necessary for experience,” in her words. “Without believing in a chosen reality, you cannot participate [...]” But in her apparitional portraits of wispy girls often near-identical or appearing in multiple—like “fractals of the self,” as she describes, or like sisters, or other relatives—the artist gives visual form to the belief that being present in the world is a state of searching rather than singularly knowing. Both diaphanous and well-worn, Schwartz’s scenes are pared down to the essence of ambiguity, like memories or thoughtforms seeking definition through hazy pentimenti in charcoal and paint and wax, scraped and peeling. Where does one self, one consciousness, one realm, one truth end and another begin?

—Margaret Kross

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Emma Rose Schwartz (b. 1992, Toronto, Canada) lives and works in New York. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014 and her MFA from Columbia University in 2019. She has had solo exhibitions at Brunette Coleman (London, United Kingdom), In Lieu (Los Angeles, CA), Annarumma Gallery (Naples, Italy), and Chapter NY (New York, NY) and has been included in recent group exhibitions at Paulina Caspari (Munich, Germany), Derosia (New York, New York), Shoot the Lobster (New York, New York), Brunette Coleman (London, United Kingdom), UNCLEBROTHER (Hancock, NY), Thierry Goldberg Gallery (New York, NY), Christian Anderson (Copenhagen, Denmark), In Lieu (Los Angeles, CA), Circle Contemporary (Chicago, IL), FALSE FLAG (New York, NY), and Y2K (New York, NY), among others. In 2019 she received the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Venice Award.