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Mira Schor: The Disembodied Mind, review by Sharon Butler

Mira Schor's galvanizingly insistent new paintings continue her exploration of self and the disembodied mind. Many painters traffic in purposeful ambiguity, using metaphor and abstraction to leave meaning-making for the viewer. Schor's work, however, is not mysterious or enigmatic: her intention is to tell us what she thinks, to enable viewers to read her mind. One small canvas, stained a bright orange, is overpainted with a black outline in the shape of a protest sign. In an elegant black script, riffing on the 1960s feminist epiphany that the personal is political, the sign reads, "This is not political." Schor, a lifelong New Yorker whose immigrant parents lost most of their family and friends during the Holocaust, is telling us that this work is unapologetically personal.

That's hardly to say that Schor is not engaged with politics. During the past four years, she has been outraged by how Trump and his Republican enablers' anti-democratic, fascist behavior and willful neglect of vital issues like climate change became normalized in the *New York Times*. So each day she began correcting the headlines and posting images of them on Instagram. Of all these pieces, one is included in the show. The front page of a *Times* Sunday Review from last August features an image of Donald Trump seated on a small chair. The headline asks: "Where Do Republicans Go From Here?" Schor smeared garish orange paint over the figure of Trump and, below the headline, in red uppercase painted letters, Schor responded "#1—> STRAIGHT TO HELL." Her rage is palpable.

In "A Very Large Fragile Drama," one of the largest paintings in the show, Schor has pieced together sheets of yellow tracing paper and covered them with blue ink that creates a delicate buckled surface. In the center she outlines the simple shape of a house, the kind a child might draw if she knew about linear perspective. Inside the house, an outlined image of a large woman sits on a chair, echoing the image of Trump in the earlier newspaper piece. In her lap she holds a book that seems to be receiving a message in the form of thin red script from the small dark window in front of her. Her outsized head is turned away from the book and the window towards the viewer at what looks like a rapidly, recklessly spinning globe hanging precariously by a thread. An owl with round red eyes, perhaps a symbol of dark times, hovers above the figure. Schor's combination of ephemeral materials, scale manipulation, and shorthand technique for representational drawing underscore the urgency of her message.

In this body of work, how we experience history weighs heavily on Schor's mind. As in much of her previous work, she uses handwritten script as both message and drawing. The handwritten word "history" appears in several paintings. We are a part of history in the moment, we study it, and yet we will never know if our participation continues after we are gone. In *Painting History Painting* Schor addresses this continuum. An image of a naked woman bends over a book, breasts hanging down. The word "history" is written upside down. The viewer can easily

read it, but the figure, who is both making and eyeing it, cannot. Constructed of a single line of red paint and starting at the woman's mouth, the word emerges on the canvas and finishes in the woman's vagina. Red streams of what must be mother's milk pour out of her breasts as if from watering cans that nourish the ongoing enterprise. Schor is connecting with her parents' experience of rising fascism by living through an incipient version of it herself. How did they find the resilience, the hope, to continue? Amid the unrelenting anxiety of the Trump years, Schor seems to have found an existential answer. In *Atlas (Woman and Flower)*, a small hand-stretched painting on canvas at the back of the gallery, the woman is clearly meant to be the artist herself, sporting Schor's cropped white hair and reading glasses. Naked, as all the figures are – clothes are superfluous – she looks at the viewer. Her arms are raised to the ceiling, like Atlas, the titan who held up the sky and the heavens. The effort enables a sunflower, which has arisen on a stem from her vagina, to bloom and grow even bigger than she is. In this cogent and powerful exhibition, Schor declares, defiantly if not quite triumphantly, that in standing up for future generations, there is hope.

"Mira Schor: Tipping Point," Lyles & King, 21 Catherine Street, New York. Through February 7, 2021.







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Where Do Republicans Go From Here?

The party looks brain-dead at every spot Trump touches. But off in the corners, there's a lot of intellectual ferment.
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