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Lily van der Stokker: 'Huh'



“Huh 1” (foreground) and “Huh 2,” two of the big, cartoonish pink shapes and motifs that make up Lily van der Stokker’s exhibition. Courtesy the artist and Jeffrey Sturges/Koenig & Clinton, New York

By Roberta Smith

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The cartoonish verve of Lily van der Stokker's irrepressible installations, which consist of walls and objects painted light, feminine shades, can sometimes disguise the originality and sharpness of her art. With subtle plays of cryptic phrases, color and forms, her best efforts appear adamantly cute until they start filling up with mixed signals of longing, conflict and repressed urges. "Huh," her current piece, meditates on the illusion of equality between the sexes, and also in relationships between artists, regardless of their sex.

An air of feigned happiness suffuses: Big pink shapes and motifs connect home and studio by conjuring a space they share, the bathroom. Beads of what appears to signify sweat, paint, tears or shower water coalesce on irregular Minimalist boxes, with looping lines that resemble stray hairs. A few too many rolls of toilet paper also set the scene, as do mildly deprecating references to various art world professionals (this critic included).

Matching shapes and phrases on three walls suggest delusional couples: "We are exactly the same" accompanies two vaguely figurative, Gustonish mounds. Around the corner, two more piles with large noses declare "Nice Being Here" to the left or right of the other. Flowers, butterflies, clouds and hearts — all clichés of greeting card joy — drift about. Two immense, elongated flowered blobs atop each other evoke feather comforters stacked for warmth or perhaps caught in some weirdly passive sexual act (or at least contemplating one). But the phrase "Laying Here Together" implies platonic asexuality.

The ostensible calm is shattered by a pink-on-pink sign, "Only yelling older women in here/Nothing to sell." To wit: Angry art by angry (especially older) female artists has no market. A free-standing canvas near the door reinstates composure, wishing us "Best regards."

You might also take note of Ms. van der Stokker's impeccable sense of scale. It gently encompasses and dwarfs without overwhelming, while we extract our different readings, of which this one but scratches the surface.

LILY VAN DER STOKKER

'Huh'

Koenig & Clinton

459 West 19th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 18

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