

The New York Times

Elisabeth Kley and Tabboo!

Roberta Smith

October 30, 2019

In the 1970s and early '80s, a fledgling art movement called Pattern and Decoration arose, thanks to the work of artists like Miriam Schapiro, Kim MacConnel, Robert Kushner and Faith Ringgold. And then it faded – overshadowed by the onslaught of American and European Neo-Expressionist painting. But P&D, as it was called, a reaction to the austerities of Minimalism and the limits of high art, never really went away. Most of the artists kept working, and the questions they raised about decoration, craft, function and (even) beauty – and the frequently pejorative connotations of those words – hung around. **These issues also mutated in the work of artists as various as Jean Lowe (who is married to Mr. MacConnel), Philip Taaffe, Rudolf Stingel and Laurel Sparks.**

The exhibition “With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985,” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, may facilitate a reassessment of P&D, the original phenomenon, as well as its outliers and its continuing influence. Art lovers in New York, however, can savor some sense of the movement’s vitality in “Garden,” a site-specific installation of paintings, drawings, ceramic vessels and usable objects at Gordon Robichaux by the artists Elisabeth Kley and Tabboo! (less well known by his given name, Stephen Tashjian), who have been friends and collaborators for around 15 years. Early on, their joint endeavors included set designs and props for Tabboo!’s stage productions and videos. Ms. Kley also photographed his impromptu performances, using the images as sources for drawings.

With “Garden,” the two achieve a dazzling parity, transforming Gordon Robichaux into an ostentatiously low-tech art menagerie inspired by the one that Tabboo! maintains in his East Village studio. Their efforts create a dense environment of plants, birds, interiors and fountains that together conjure Persian courts, Roman wall paintings, the Wiener Werkstätte and much more. The fountains are real, made in glazed terra cotta by Ms. Kley. So are the stools and planters, featuring mostly her savvy black-and-white patterns – motifs that she has also transferred to the walls of one room.

Tabboo!, an incredibly talented if undervalued painter, has added colorful tropical scenes and abstract patterns to the walls of a second room. Paintings on canvas by both artists recur throughout the installation. Tabboo!’s drawings of imaginary plants imaginatively named set the whole show slightly on edge, highlighting the sharp contemporaneity of the artists’ sense of touch and pattern and their quotations of design. It’s always a good day when the so-called decorative takes no prisoners.