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In New York, Jane Kaplowitz Rejoins the Party

BY JEREMY GLOSTER | DECEMBER 11, 2018



Jane Kaplowitz, "These Birds Are Lesbians," 2015. Acrylic, colored pencil and marker. 22 1/2 x 30 in. 57.1 x 76.2 cm.

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(Courtesy of Fortnight Institute)

Jane Kaplowitz's first solo exhibition in 19 years, currently on view at Fortnight Institute in the East Village, announces itself through an identity problem that can only emerge from taking on a married name. There's only one Jane here, bifurcated by surnames — Kaplowitz, a post-Pop artist who has gained and lost broader recognition, and then the other, Rosenblum, the widow of the irreverent art historian Robert Rosenblum, who died in 2006. The latter goes to parties, events, dinners, and hosts more; the former meticulously catalogs all of this social activity in her art. When these two persons merge, they produce a rather paradoxical figure: an insider's insider working under the outsider's guise.

As much a reintroduction as a retrospective, "RSVP Jane Rosenblum," curated by Alison Gingeras, does not confuse the relative obscurity of its subject for innocence or refusal.

Kaplowitz is evidently a society painter, but prepositions matter: She is of, rather than for, a specific New York art world milieu. Decidedly not the kind of artist whose work might provide a convenient Instagram backdrop for Ivanka, but instead a dedicated collector of dinner party paraphernalia: the announcement card, the gala invitation, the inscrutable menu. She translates these materials to canvas and paper, in faint acrylics and watercolors, as if each invitation has arrived, for decades on end, by total surprise.

The career-spanning collection of paintings here are hung salon-style, foregrounding the inherent sociality of Kaplowitz's project, a sort of homage to her history of hosting. Aesthetically twee, the cobbled hang more closely approximates the gallery walls at Soho House, The Wing, or some coffee shop in Nolita than those of 27 rue de Fleurus, though to make note of this palatable *joie de vivre* is not to malign the works on view. These are remarkable pieces, given to strange preoccupations, not limited to the reproductions of old mail: celebrity portraits of figures, like one of Robert De Niro, adapted from a promotional still for "Cape Fear"; musings on gay sex among animals; a bullfight; a shopping list; Madonna and Britney Spears engaged in their iconic kiss at the 2003 VMAs. Even the invitation pieces are rarely left unadorned, clinically copied; more often, they're doodled over, as one might distractedly draw on an old to-do list.

Certain titles describe the crowd or setting — for instance, "Jack Bankowsky & Diego Cortez, April 22," 1993; "Gagosian Gallery/ David Salle/ Lisa Liebmann," 1994; "Four Seasons," 2016 — but do little to explain the whimsicality, the verve, the intentional application of the dilettante's hand. As always, though, style is substance, and Kaplowitz's style has the odd effect of dramatizing the dissonance between the staid confines of the life she documents and the exuberance she exudes, which is to say the discord between her public and private selves.

Through that contradiction, this diaristic body of work produces, over and over, a coherent sense of self, revealing a somewhat eccentric set of desires, habits, fixations, compulsions. Indeed innumerable artists deal in more abjectly confessional material, but who else would paint their bottle of generic Xanax (prescribing physician, address, dosage, all clearly legible) and title it "Bestie"? As this piece demonstrates, there is a sort of *jouissance* in Kaplowitz's oeuvre for publicizing the private that transcends her stated archival impulse, her self-proclaimed role as a "secret historian" of a narrowly-defined chattering class. No one familiar with this work, or Google, is fooled by the pseudonym, anyway. Yet to suspend your disbelief, to submit to the split-identity narrative as Kaplowitz does, is to reward yourself with the constant, intoxicating refrain that she, the artist, was there the whole time.

"RSVP Jane Rosenblum" is at Fortnight Institute, 60 East 4th St. New York, NY 10003 through January 6, 2019. More information: <https://fortnight.institute/>