

CHATEAUSHATTO

HELEN JOHNSON

Slow Learners

Opening Saturday, January 17, 2015

6 - 9 pm

Through February 28, 2015

Thoughts shift from one painting to the next as a bee visits flowers.

A woman bends towards a keyhole and presumably what she sees corresponds to an encounter with a painting: a space that is instantly framed.

Helen Johnson might tease an image out of a furrowed surface; make a painting in sympathy with Photoshop while leaving the program out of the production; she may embed a consumer experience questionnaire within a painting, bringing the qualitative judgments that any art work expects right to its surface. (The painting wants to know if you're satisfied with it.) Historical specificity of Australia's colonial clutch might be frontal in one painting and on the next there is no subject other than the painting itself.

The grid of assembled images loosely references Instagram, or an image search – uptaking a formal attribute from the internet the way painting has always uptaken attributes – the way it uptook the crop from photography. It's still painting but it will always reflect its circumstances.

The subjective elasticity that is afforded by painting permits Johnson to push her works to the brink of failure and set up a process in which she must wrestle or coax or fashion them back to a point of resonance. As the problems are problems that the artist constructs, the resolution of the works is produced by cycles of self-questioning.

Perhaps you could call it semio-expressionism, coupled with an insistence upon the grounding of subjecthood in materiality.

In the variety, flirtation and contradiction of Helen Johnson's work, we pay a visit to painting's enduring ambition: as a site where one can conjure and commit new space.