

KATHRYN LYNCH'S FLOWER PAINTINGS

[Kathryn Lynch](#) is an artist much concerned with illumination. The trees and grasslands and waterways she paints are saturated with the glow of the sun or the shine of the moon; her portraits of New York buildings are abuzz with the colorful artificiality of city lights at night; and her recent series of tugboats show us vessels passing with dreamlike ease through ghostly-bright fog, or else bobbing gently on a shining Hudson, trapped between a giant red sun and that sun's smudged reflection on the river. In all of Lynch's paintings there's an interesting interplay of light and dark, and in the best of her work there's also a sense of enlightenment – a feeling that behind her flat forms and lullaby colors, serious truths are layered. –

Jonathan Lee, Guest Contributor



Kathryn Lynch | Blossom Explosion, 2012, 60 x 48 inches

Lynch's recent show, 'Big Flowers For The Little Gallery,' brought a series of her flower paintings to the white walls of The Little Gallery in Sharon Springs, New York. As with so much of her work, the forms she displayed were deceptively unfussy. She's a self-confessed simplist, an artist who paints what she sees but combines

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representation with abstraction. She chooses subjects that might flash by in the corner of an eye; she pauses to record them in all their strangeness. An oil-on-paper painting like 'Morning', from 2009, presents at first glance a sky suffused with attractive egg-yolk orange; the spreading light seems set to nurture the cold, monochromatic landscape below. It is only at second or third glance that this intense band of orange seems a little more macabre – in its uniformity and liquid scope, it could easily be the afterglow of an explosion. In a similar vein, the beauty of a night sky alive with ribbons of light in 'Fireworks,' a painting from 2008, at first obscures the viewer's awareness of how vulnerable the boats floating below must be. Fiery embers are pattering down around these vessels like vivid splashes of blood. The prettiness of the scene hides a violence.

The flower paintings shown at the Little Gallery continue this dualism, the romantic and the dark combining. Most of the canvases exhibited are striking for their vibrant liveliness. The paintings are full of passionate reds and the bright yellows of full bloom, bursts of intense color that draw us in with their purity and power without upsetting the balance of the pieces. Lynch's characteristic gift for softness – for rounded edges and smooth lines – adds to the initial sense of benevolence, and the unusually large scale of many of the paintings in itself imparts a joyfulness: 'Big Yellow Flower,' an 84 by 72 inch painting, insists on warming a room.



Kathryn Lynch | Big Yellow Flower, 2013, oil on canvas, 84 x 72 inches.

But just as Lynch's paintings of tugboats can sometimes suggest, within their stillness, a menacing momentum – a red light blinking as the boat approaches the viewer through the gloom – so her portraits of flowers are sophisticated enough to accommodate a sense of stress. 'Red Flower,' one of the most impactful pieces on display, gives us a flower-head that fixes the viewer with its central, pitted lunar eye. There's something intimidating about being in the flower's line of sight; roles are reversed. Around the flower's eye, petals seem to melt away a little: lines waver and lengthen and, at the bottom of the canvas, red paint drips down out of view, trying to escape the frame.

A sense of threat can also be found in 'Passion,' another flower painting that is as enticing as it is alarming. The dominant color here is bright scarlet and again the paint insists on dripping. Lynch doesn't give a species name to her flower, but the viewer can't help but think of poppies and of what the poppy symbolizes in western culture. There's a suggestion of remembrance, of sacrifice, of

bloodshed. The fact that the flower-type is unspecified – that 'Passion' is the only interpretative label we're given – might be Lynch's way of hinting at the anonymity or universality of suffering, or it may simply be a means of teasing us and forcing us to pause. She's an artist who likes to play with appearances. She asks more questions than she offers answers.



Kathryn Lynch / Passion, 2012, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 inches

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favor of the arid beiges and greenish-browns of dampness and decay. The crowded flowers in 'Blossom Explosion' press determinedly upward towards an unseen sun. This gives the painting a sense of exhilarating momentum, but also imparts an awareness that only the fittest of these stems will survive. In another of Lynch's flower paintings, a piece teasingly entitled 'Red Hot,' we find ourselves admiring a sultry, fatally pretty flower, but the beauty is still double-edged: we're pretty sure that surrounding plant-life, confined to the shadows, doesn't stand a chance.



Kathryn Lynch | Red Hot, 2012, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

One of the things each of Lynch's flower paintings have in common is the wonderful lopsidedness of the forms she represents. Everything she paints is suffused with the air of a dream or a memory and this can give her work a fairytale feel – the best kind of fairytales, the ones that are dark and true. The paintings refuse to indulge any illusions of perfection. Her flowers are allowed to droop and to wilt. They are allowed to be ugly as well as lovely. The sun that gives them life can also kill them. Transformation cuts both ways; things grow and they also turn to mulch. 'There is,' as Lynch has said, 'always something else behind what is being painted.' In her flower portraits, she takes a subject matter that inevitably exists at the edges of cliché and reclaims it, making the flowers uniquely hers. She reminds us of the complex satisfactions of everyday things, and invites us to slow down and take a look.

Jonathan Lee is a British novelist living in Brooklyn.

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