

ART

## Finding Crystalline Clarity in the Seemingly Chaotic

The technical mastery of Annie Lapin's paintings is like that of a juggler who can simultaneously toss balls, bowling pins, flaming torches, and a chainsaw.

Daniel Gerwin    December 10, 2019



Installation view, *Annie Lapin: Strange Little Beast* at Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles. Left: Annie Lapin, "Encounter Counter (heap 4)" (2019), oil, acrylic, and charcoal, 72 x 96 in.; right: Annie Lapin, "a dance in the future" (2019), oil, acrylic and flocking on linen, 23 x 18 in. (all images courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles)

LOS ANGELES — *Strange Little Beast*, Annie Lapin's first exhibition at Shulamit Nazarian, hints at the artist's ability — and perhaps desire — to paint like an Old Master, but it also indicates an understanding that she cannot live in the past. Lapin's canvases reveal her wrestling match with post-digital aesthetics as she combines computerized tools with older rendering styles in an effort to paint for her own era.

"The On In Outs (heap 5)" (all works 2019) exemplifies Lapin's facility in constructing an image in multiple conflicting idioms. The lower half of the painting predominantly features the forelegs and fleece of a goat. Drawing on Renaissance techniques, representational elements are conveyed using loose brushwork to precise effect. Where the goat's chest should be is instead the (headless) bust of a figure in formal, three-quarter pose, painted with post-impressionist brushwork. A horizontal strip depicting a landscape just above the painting's midline is also painted in a post-impressionist style, while a stratum of clouds at the top is photorealist; these two bands are repeatedly interrupted by a third abstract layer of brushy, poured, and sprayed paint, itself pierced by a linear element framing the posing figure.



Annie Lapin, "The On In Outs (heap 5)" (2019), oil, acrylic, charcoal, glitter, volcanic glass, and enamel spray paint, 82 x 72 in.



Installation view, *Annie Lapin: Strange Little Beast* at Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles. Left: Annie Lapin, "Wolf, Garden, Subduction (heap 2)" (2019), oil, acrylic, charcoal, mica, and enamel spray paint 72 x 96 in.; right: Annie Lapin, "Picket Blanknic (heap 3)" (2019), oil, acrylic, charcoal, and mica, 72 x 96 in.

If this all sounds chaotic, it is and isn't. There is a vertiginous quality to this work that may leave some viewers feeling a little seasick; my eyes needed time to adjust to Lapin's disjunctive pictures and competing horizons. Yet once they did, I found a crystalline clarity in her works. Lapin's technical mastery is like that of a juggler who can simultaneously toss balls, bowling pins, flaming torches, and a chainsaw. Her paintings deploy a wide range of media including oil, acrylic, flashe, charcoal, glass, and enamel, revealing not merely her facility but her delight in material. She knows how to manage the collision of one pictorial vocabulary with another, and excels at using drop shadows to create illusions of various layers hovering above the picture plane. Lapin's collaged compositions show evidence of Photoshop, a tool she has long used (though, as she told me at the exhibition's opening, she uses it much more since the birth of her children because it allows her to test endless possibilities without excessive sanding, scraping, or other techniques that create toxicity).

Other stand-out paintings on display include "Catnose Emergent (heap 6)," "Wolf, Garden, Subduction (heap 2)," and "Halving Having (StepScape 4)," the last another example of Lapin dividing the canvas horizontally at the center to create two or more competing horizons. A number of repeated motifs are discernible throughout this new body of work, some more apparent than others. Hands, faces, figures, animals, and classic landscape elements all recur, resulting in deeper levels of organization. These themes suggest a painter pondering her (and our) place in the world. While some artists make imagery that creates a quiet moment of reflection, Lapin's places us in the heart of chaotic experience.