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Stephanie Rose

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Among the themes nurtured through the long history of art is that of the *Sacra Conversazione*, wherein under noble auspices the divine approaches the human in a space symmetrically governed, light-filled and calm. To this tradition, Stephanie Rose contributes a fecund perversion, for as her recent paintings show, she is master of the profane conversation.

Somewhere between late modern pandemonium and post-modern visitation lie the situations Rose has concocted for this superb exhibition. Within a schematic stage viewed past a drawn curtain typically sits a drawn version of an abstract sculpture, threatened from above by the presence of paint tubes caricaturally rendered, or, failing that, a conversational balloon swiped from the comics. Hyped fluorescent color of these generic balloons delivers a visual wallop even as they aggravate the intellectual difference between the street-smart vulgarity and school-smart erudition of form. Rose's canvases truly enact the aesthetic tensions currently existing in the art world at large, not merely between "low" and "high" strains of modernity but also within the perennially vexed process by which modern art synthesizes seemingly incongruent cultural experiences. The information overload associated with the paintings of George Condo does not have full sway, for this mode must, in Rose's view of things, accommodate the intense mythic labor in the art of the welding, forging sculptors like David Smith. Distinguishing Rose's paintings from so many cynical compilations of style is the sustained gutsy imagination brought to painterly process. The given motifs do not serve as pretexts for stylistic reference — shown to be bogus — but are assimilated to a felt and transforming creativity. It is by this means that the artist declares herself culturally responsible.

Marjorie Welsh



Stephanie Rose, *Reveille*, 1990, oil on canvas, 72x66 in.