

TIBOR DE NAGY

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Medrie MacPhee

The Repair

March 15 to April 19, 2025



Medrie MacPhee

For the Record, 2023

oil and mixed media on canvas

64 x 84 inches

Tibor de Nagy Gallery is pleased to present Medrie MacPhee - *The Repair*, the gallery's third exhibition with the artist. For the occasion, the art historian Nancy Princenthal wrote the following essay on MacPhee's work.

Helpfully providing some coordinates for her recent paintings, Medrie MacPhee directed my attention to a few sculptors, including Phyllida Barlow. In particular, she cited the car trips Barlow remembered taking with her father through London just after World War II, when the domestic interiors of half-bombed buildings remained exposed. It made me think also of London-born Judy Pfaff's similar experience of London after the blitz. Both women became poets of the fragmentary. MacPhee herself, in earlier collages and drawings, took architecture

and demolition as primary references, depicting structures blasted open and flattened, both ravaged and ordered.

The paintings MacPhee now assembles from used clothes are like floorplans of deconstructed bodies. Or, like maps of the globe, the world cut and flattened. But volume resists; it wants to expand, to pucker. In MacPhee's current work, shapes and colors jostle, elbowing each other. Ripped seams are soldered with paint and thereby heightened, like scars. Buttons and zippers are rendered useless, but prominent. MacPhee's paintings can evoke abbreviated contour drawings, as in *The Path of No Return*. Or, strongly suggest blueprints (*Circulation of Desire, For the Record*). There is both violence and repair in the work. And, on occasion, the calm of a settled landscape.

In the UK, and in Canada, where MacPhee grew up, billboards and walls on which ads and posters are plastered, often one on top of the other, are called hoardings. The Affichistes of postwar Paris made away with these palimpsests, sometimes ripping them from round kiosks as well, and then tearing them back to reveal layers hidden beneath; some were already torn. Among artists on her mind, MacPhee names the last century's two hotly competitive Louises. She notes that Nevelson stalked her neighborhood while it was being demolished in the 1950s, scavenging wood to fashion her baleful storage units. Bourgeois, equally unwilling to give up her past, preserved the silks and linens of her trousseau and, toward the end of her long life, hung them on spindly mobiles; she also patched together fearsome cloth figures from salvaged textile remnants. Both artists transformed their pasts—their hoardings—into art. MacPhee's paintings are steeped in material history, too, though it is less self-referential. Clothes have memories of their own.

Along with unrelinquished memory, there is discord in MacPhee's work—as, for instance, in the tumbling tank tops and tight, sassy red pants of *Yes*. MacPhee writes of “finding a new use for the discards and cheap clothes that are pawed over in a bin.” The novelist E.L. Doctorow once described, in a public talk, women of his mother's age bargain hunting at S. Klein on the Square and furiously sifting through such bins, the clothes “fountaining” as they searched—an indelible image. The rag trade remains a furious business, and a business of immigrants and immigration, with “second-hand” clothing circulating from country to country, bearing progressively cryptic messages (sometimes literally, in the form T-shirts bearing text): the code of thrift.

That polyglot tongue of recycled textiles informs MacPhee's work. Its language, she says, has a rebellious lyricism that borrows its bleak but plainspoken humor from Samuel Beckett. Calling her undertaking “an absurd task,” she also describes it as one that is inescapably human. “Get

the clothing, unpick it, splay it out, gesso over it many times, paint something on top that may or may not adhere to the structure underneath. A mirroring,” she adds, “of the task of living.”

-- Nancy Princenthal

Nancy Princenthal is a New York-based writer whose book *Agnes Martin: Her Life and Art* received the 2016 PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. She is also the author of *Unspeakable Acts: Women, Art, and Sexual Violence* in the 1970s and *Hannah Wilke*, and her essays have appeared in monographs on Doris Salcedo, Robert Mangold, Willie Cole and Gary Simmons, among many others. A longtime Contributing Editor (and former Senior Editor) at *Art in America*, she has also written for the *New York Times*, *Hyperallergic*, *Bomb*, *Apollo* and elsewhere.

Medrie MacPhee is based in New York. She was born in Edmonton and attended NSCAD in the 1970s. She has exhibited in Canada and the US for over four decades. Museum collections include the Metropolitan Museum, NY; the McMichael Canadian Art Collection; the National Gallery of Canada; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; the Art Gallery of Ontario, The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, the Palmer Museum of Art, PA; the Asheville Museum, NC; MacPhee is the recipient of numerous awards including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, American Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Prize Awards, Anonymous Was A Woman Award, and a Pollock-Krasner Award. MacPhee is a fellow of The National Academy of Design and Emeritus Professor of Art, Bard College.