



REVIEW - 03 AUG 2016

Farah Atassi

Xippas, Paris, France

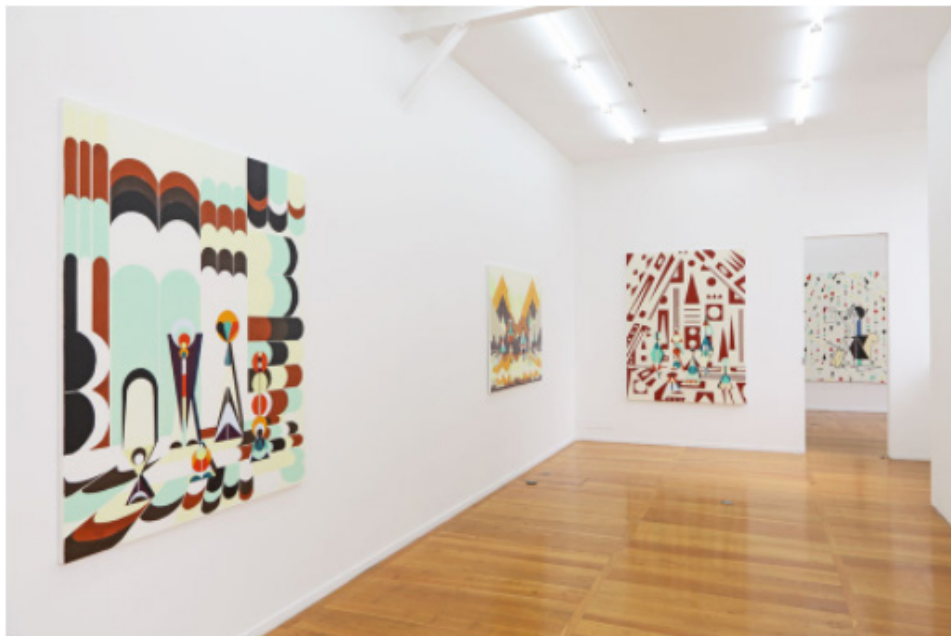
BY DEVIKA SINGH

Farah Atassi's new paintings are filled with diagrammatic shapes that hover somewhere between abstraction and figuration. With her cheerful palette, the artist – who was nominated for the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2013 – has moved away from the cool architectural compositions that characterized her earlier work towards exploring the figure in space. Triangles, squares and single lines in thick oil and glycerol paints seem to bounce across the patterned surfaces of these large canvases. Atassi is fascinated by the nude and the still life – the grand themes of modern painting – as well as the carnival. Although the paintings are full of references (Atassi has said that she owes a debt to cubism), her use of quotation often has a teasing element to it: for example, the influence of Pablo Picasso's female nudes loom large but in *Nude in the Studio* (all works 2016) the one-eyed model seems to be winking at the viewer. The nimble female body at the centre of the painting is created from an assemblage of triangles set against graphic, colourful zigzagging lines. Only a long, undulating stroke signals the woman's curly locks. The Painter is an equally playful work. Its focus is a seemingly anodyne artist holding a brush and a palette. Mocking the stereotypical egotism of the male artist, the canvas is empty and the painter's face reduced to a caricature.



Farah Atassi, *Nude in the studio*, 2016, oil and enamel on canvas, 2 x 1.6 m. Courtesy: galerie Xippas; photograph: Frédéric Lanternier

The backgrounds of all nine works in this exhibition comprise scotch-tape grids. Nearly invisible in reproduction, this armature gives a rugged texture to the works when seen up close. Using streaks of colour to build her pictorial structure, the artist paints lines on the upper edges of her canvases that are smudged and imperfect. The final all-over pattern often references Native American geometric folk designs; this both creates a wallpaper effect while locking the figure inside the composition.



Farah Atassi, 2016, exhibition view, Xippas, Paris. Courtesy: galerie Xippas; photograph: Frédéric Lanternier

In the second, untitled series of the exhibition, the murky chromatic gradations of the paintings *Psychedelic Setting* and *Psychedelic Setting II* recall 1970s design. In these works, the figure-ground distinction collapses, though the background is never entirely flat: Atassi overlaps forms to convey a sense of depth. The series references the theories of the French painter Henry Valensi who, in the 1930s, encouraged artists to base their compositions on musical arrangements. In *Metronomes*, jaunty, puppet-like musical devices are displayed in a similar set: the mechanical ballets of Oskar Schlemmer come to mind.



Farah Atassi,
Psychedelic Setting II, 2016, oil and enamel on canvas, 1.6 x 1.3 m.
Courtesy: galerie Xippas; photograph: Frédéric Lanternier

For two key paintings, *Still Life in Red* and *Full Color Still Life*, Atassi borrowed from both hard-edge painting and Henri Matisse's cutouts to create boisterous table arrangements of vases and flowers. Broken-up planes pop out of these high-spirited compositions that seem reassuringly familiar. Figure and object are treated with the same ebullience here and the result is exuberant: a hugely enjoyable take on the history of modern painting.

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