

ARTFORUM

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Farah Atassi, *Model In Studio 2*, 2019, oil and glycerol on canvas, 78 3/4 × 70 7/8".

Farah Atassi

CONSORTIUM MUSEUM

For more than a decade, Farah Atassi has painted imaginary interiors that range from mundane tiled bathrooms to exotic patterned tepees and fanciful Mondrian-inspired playrooms. United by a compressed depth of field that the artist achieves via her dizzyingly masterful subjection of geometric motifs to one-point perspective, Atassi's paintings have also, until recently, been unpopulated. Her latest exhibition, which comprised more than a dozen paintings made between 2017 and 2019, showed Cubist-style figures and musical instruments occupying her signature shallow spaces.

Atassi cites Picasso as an inspiration for her foray into figuration, and her references to the Spaniard's work—from the fragmented and distorted bodies of her female figures to the Breton stripes they sport—are clear. However, in her refusal to privilege

her newfound figurative subjects over their settings (and thus to establish a hierarchy that would help to classify these paintings as portraits and still lifes), Atassi channels another French artist: Édouard Vuillard. Recalling the Nabi painter's interiors in which women's dresses magically blend into the wallpaper, Atassi's new works similarly bond their subjects to their environments. In *Model in Studio 2*, 2019, a figure sits on a chair in front of an array of circular and rectangular canvases and an empty stretcher. Half naked, with her head propped on her fist, the model is an assemblage of geometric shapes. Equilateral and isosceles triangles denote her head, hair, and torso; semicircles suggest breasts and buttocks; disks indicate fingers and feet. The studio setting is likewise a study in geometry. A bold yellow-on-blue pattern of circles, rectangles, and triangles covering the entire room appears to bend and slope across the floor, walls, and peaked ceiling. By reprising the same formal elements in her representations of corporeal and environmental elements, Atassi also erases the boundaries between foreground and background.

Reiterating Vuillard's holistic view of art, Atassi paints figures that are no more prominent than their settings and makes a point of equating fine art and design. One need only look at the model's shirt and the painted canvases stacked behind her in several of the studio paintings to see that a stripe is a stripe is a stripe. Backgrounds filled with geometric shapes in punchy and pastel colors evoke the Memphis Group, while those featuring kaleidoscopic wave motifs would feel right at home on a Pucci textile. The seated model in *Woman in Rocking Chair 4*, 2019, emerges from a sea of scalloped stripes. Atassi repeats the plump curves that make up the background in the figure's hair, breasts, crossed legs, and curled-up toes. In *Jazz Set*, 2018, assorted musical instruments are set against a totally 1980s backdrop comprising a black-and-white grid punctuated by mint-green triangles overlaid with mustard circles. Once again confusing foreground and background, Atassi makes it difficult to distinguish some of the instruments from their setting. For example, a circle that is almost the exact same size and color as in those featured in the background pattern represents a tambourine. In Atassi's paintings, distinct elements cohere into something rich and resonant, like notes forming a musical chord.

— Mara Hoberman