

SHELLEY REED'S CURIOUS NATURE

A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT

I do not think I am alone in thinking Shelley Reed has "made it." I admire her, look up to her and respect her work. She makes no secret of how hard she works or how serious she is, but she is also approachable, generous and kind. She has had an impressive trajectory in the last 10 years since winning the Maud Morgan Prize for painting in 2005. Reed is currently represented by the Sears-Peyton and Danese/Corey galleries in New York City, and her work has recently been on view at the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Wyoming, the Columbia Museum of Art in South Carolina and The Art Institute of Chicago in Illinois.

I was first introduced to Reed's work by friends who knew that I have a particular fascination for artists who work with animals in unique and surprising ways. When I visited her studio at Westinghouse Lofts to see her work in progress, the first thing I noticed was that her paintings barely fit into her working space. Next, I viewed her show at Danese/Corey Gallery, where Reed's sprawling canvases breathed and came to life with the narrative literally running the length of the spacious gallery walls. Then I saw her work in "Fertile Solitude" at the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts, where two panels were installed

at 90-degree angles. In that show, Reed literally and figuratively turned a corner by creating an installation that allowed the viewer to enter into, and be surrounded by, the work.

Reed's current show at the Fitchburg Art Museum is the culmination of many years of dedicated studio practice. "A Curious Nature" debuts her proficiency with works on paper and her focus on monumental pieces. Until recently, Reed's black-and-white works on canvas have featured cinematic narratives of animal allegories. New works on paper, in abstract modular sections, are assembled to form gigantic studies of single, isolated subjects. It is the best installation of her work to date.

"For this show, our hope was to give each painting enough space for viewers to enjoy its sheer beauty and scale," said curator Lisa Crossman. "The ambiguity that Reed embraces in her paintings encourages visitors to contemplate her fabricated scenes - composed of fragments borrowed from historical paintings - as a means to reflect on the 'curious nature' of our world anew."

It is a spiritual axiom that the narrower one's focus, the wider one's lens within that chosen world. Whether you take that to mean one's depth of understanding, the limits of one's imagination or one's proficiency or skill, I would say that holds true for Reed's choice of colors. Whether her imagery invokes black-and-white photographs, Dutch still-lives or grayscale, it packs a punch. In a world full of

too many choices that lack meaning, her spare palette of black and white is refreshing. It forces her to say what she needs to without distracting elements.

The secret to Reed's success could be summed up by her commitment to her artwork first and foremost, with an equal focus on networking and the business side of her art career. To counteract the isolation of working in the studio, and to bring artists together in the wake of the cutbacks to art criticism in the Boston Globe, Reed created Artist to Artist at Artists for Humanity. Following the success of this one-night party, she initiated Wine Wednesdays: a monthly gathering of artists in the Boston area. The generosity of spirit behind these grassroots efforts speaks volumes as to the nature of Shelley Reed's

character and her role in the art community in Boston.

Twenty-five years ago, Reed was involved in the development of 75 Richdale Ave. in Cambridge. Some might be more familiar with this as the former Payne Elevator Building that was developed into artist lofts. Fast forward, and Reed was one of the first tenants in the Westinghouse Lofts in Hyde Park, proving once again that she is always on the scene, or working behind the scenes, to make things happen. Shelley Reed is a mover and a shaker and we are lucky to have her energy, her talent and her art work in Boston.

Donna Dodson lives in Maynard, Mass.; she co-curated "Wood as Muse," on view from May 7-September 3 at the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury, Mass.



Shelley Reed, *Tiger (after Janssens and Landseer)*, 2017, oil on paper, 90" x 88"; *White Horse (after Grant and Stubbs)*, 2016, oil on paper, 90" x 132"; *City Bound (after Ward and Breenbergh)*, 2014, oil on canvas, 48" diameter. Installation view, *A Curious Nature: Paintings by Shelley Reed*, Fitchburg Art Museum. Courtesy of Danese/Corey. ©2017 Charles Sternaimolo.