



GALLERIES

## Portraits of Artists and Writers Who Vanished From Public View

References to artists and writers that were once prolific members of public life but later chose to vanish from public view are planted throughout Claire Tabouret's show.

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Claire Tabouret, "In the Frosty Morning," (2017), acrylic on canvas, 36 x 30 in. (all images courtesy the artist and Night Gallery unless otherwise noted)

LOS ANGELES — As I walked through [Claire Tabouret's \*Eclipse\*](#) at Night Gallery I couldn't help but feel I was being watched. Haunted stares and enigmatic figures imbue the space with a nagging sense of uneasiness and foreboding, beginning with Tabouret's painting "The Eclipse" (2017), for which the exhibition is named. The painting's colors imply a post-

apocalyptic toxicity, with muted greens and yellows making up the atmosphere around a group of smartly dressed young women. The viewer can only assume they are watching the aforementioned eclipse, a natural phenomenon often used as a metaphor for disappearance and transition.



Claire Tabouret, "The Wanderer (blue)," (2017), acrylic on canvas, 98 3/8 x 66 7/8 in.

In keeping with this analogy, references to artists and writers that were once prolific members of public life but later chose to vanish from public view are planted throughout the show. The first is [Isabelle Eberhardt](#) in "The Wanderer (blue)" (2017), a writer who frequently appears in Tabouret's work. Eberhardt renounced a position of privilege in Switzerland to explore and embrace North African culture, where they eventually converted to Islam and began dressing as a man. Tabouret depicts Eberhardt on horseback in the process of turning away from the viewer. The figure rejects our

gaze in a way that mirrors their eschewal of Western society.

Her rebellious subject makes Tabouret's choice of medium somewhat ironic. I have a hard time thinking of anything more Western in art than historical painting and portraiture, which essentially make up the entirety of the exhibition. And while her paint choice is acrylic, her sweeping brushstrokes, muted colors, and hazy figure/ground relationships speak to the traditional language of oils. Eberhardt may have rejected a conventional life, but Tabouret's portraits are less clear-cut. There's a kind of "look-at-me, don't-look-at-me" indecision at the heart of her painted subjects, emphasized by the inherent contradiction of rendering these eccentric, vanishing figures in a traditional form that generally depicts people who embrace public life.





Installation view of Claire Tabouret's *Eclipse* at Night Gallery, Los Angeles (photo by Jeff McLane)

In one portrait, Tabouret depicts the writer [Robert Walser](#), who, after marginal success in his youth, suffered a nervous breakdown and spent the rest of his life in a sanatorium where he eventually passed, his body discovered in a field of snow nearby. The painting “In The Frosty Morning” (2017) features a man (presumably Walser) disappearing into the background. Another piece, “Snow in the Desert” (2017), is painted exuberantly, filled with a kind of magical energy manifested through a combination of drips, dots, and firework-like brushstrokes of foliage. In it, a gender-ambiguous figure again walks away from the viewer. It is most likely Agnes Martin, another one of Tabouret’s muses, who escaped the New York art scene for a solitary life in the desert.



Claire Tabouret, “Snow in the Desert,” (2017), acrylic on canvas, 90 1/2 x 129 7/8 in.

Other figures, such as the sitters in “The Stains (brown)” (2017) and “Makeup (magenta mouth)” (2017) also walk the lines between gender, amounting to a feminine androgyny. One is not sure if the subjects are treated gently or cruelly, streaked as they are with stains and smears across the mouth, as though they had just indulged in a gluttonous meal or smudged excessive amounts of lipstick on their face. The paintings hint at our consumption, the hallmark behavior of Western capitalism. In this sense, the unapologetic subjects of these portraits serve as an antithesis to the disappearing artist figures, embracing what they reject.

Tabouret’s beautifully painted exhibition ultimately renders the metaphor of the eclipse no less clear and I leave with more questions than answers. Is it that these figures truly turn away from society, eschewing it for a



Claire Tabouret, “Makeup (magenta mouth), (2017), acrylic on wood, 20 x 16 1/4 in.

“purer” form of life and practice, or is their disappearance more tantamount to an alternative career move, an immortalization in obscurity?

In the end, all we are left with is our morbid fascination in watching them fade away.

Claire Tabouret: Eclipse continues at *Night Gallery* (2276 E 16th St, Los Angeles) through March 4.