

The Strong and the Weak

Patrick Shoemaker

Northern Daughters Gallery, Vergennes, Vermont

On view: Sept 1 - October 15

Opening Reception: September 8th, 5-8pm

Review by Cynthia Close, published in Art New England, 2017

Boots, or some sort of generic feet are just one of the figurative elements that occasionally appear, often floating, dismembered from the body to which they belong, in the paintings of Patrick Shoemaker on exhibition now through mid October at Northern Daughters Gallery in the tiny city of Vergennes, Vermont. While open only a year, this elegant new space has brought a decidedly upscale vibe to the sedate Green Mountain state, whose galleries lean heavily towards craft and landscape painting.

The slyly sophisticated work of Brooklyn based Shoemaker makes reference to folk art, sometimes overtly such as in the decorative flower motifs in *Wreath*, or more subtly, in the repetitive fronds of *Chase* where spikey eared animal shapes play hide and seek across the canvas with something vaguely human.

All the paintings in this show are recent, having been completed in the last two years. *The Strong and the Weak*, the painting for which the exhibition is named and my personal favorite, depicts two rabbits running across the middle of a blood-red ground as a foxlike critter stands closer to the viewer. In between we see those disembodied feet, remnants of the human element, which in this case may have been the loser on nature's battlefield.

The color is scrumptious and Shoemaker's soft edged forms float airily just above the canvas surface, mimicking watercolor, but with a rich quality that can only be achieved with oil. The artist acknowledges his debt to Milton Avery, and to Matisse while incorporating his own unique tension lurking just beneath the gauzy atmosphere. Shapes run to the edge and are often cut, not arbitrarily, but decisively, giving all the works the impression they were sliced out of a moving tableau.

We may be seduced by Shoemaker's color but struggles are occurring. In *Hindrance*, two figures are tangled up together. They could be fighting or dancing. Meaning is ambiguous. Clearly they are making it difficult for each other to move. Menace shows its face in *Yellow Danger* and in *Beast Beating*. However, in *Small Fight (Warm Embrace)* the either/or possibilities of alternative interpretations of meaning are openly acknowledged. This refreshing show should not be missed.