

The Ladies Rock: Power Femmes at McClain Gallery

By Catherine D. Ansporn



Kelli Vance, *So as to Accept What is Waiting for Me*, 2015, charcoal on panel

McClain Gallery's summer sizzler gives the viewer pause for thought about the meaning of feminism while serving up some beautiful, powerful and occasionally disturbing imagery.

Senior American master Alex Katz — he of the exquisite lines and elegant economy of means — captivates with a crisp view of nine women rendered life-size, each 80 by 30 inches, in meticulously silk-screened prints. As many as 37 colors are employed by the artist to produce crisp versions of women in the timeless

wardrobe staple: a little black dress. Blondes, brunettes, redheads and women of raven hair are all cheekily depicted with a great amount of charm and wit. (The viewer yearns for more diversity beyond the mostly Caucasian flock of femmes, but perhaps another series is planned?)



Kelli Vance, *How Inseparably I Was Bound*, 2015 oil on canvas, 36 x 96 inches

In a perfect bookend to Katz, the gallery's adjunct space presents an eagerly anticipated solo for Houston artist Kelli Vance, her second at McClain (the most recent was in 2009). Vance is one of a handful of Texas talents taking up the banner of realism and figuration, standing out in a field largely dominated by abstraction. Working in a pared-down language and with cropped canvases, Vance's subject is a mysterious woman (oftentimes the artist herself), who is the subject of some serious S&M games. What could be trite and overdone steams with a cinematic uncertainty. Following in the tradition of Cindy Sherman, James Rosenquist, David Salle and even Marilyn Minter (especially evoked in several drawings here), Vance contributes an original voice that sultrily whispers for our attention. (Katz through July 18, Vance on view through July 25.)