

“Buddhas in the Garden,” Hedy Klineman’s sensuous new series of mixed-media paintings, deftly employs vibrant colors and spiritual imagery to offer the type of keen social insight that has marked her four-decades-long career.

Returning to a familiar face, the ethereal stone Buddha that graced her 1990s oeuvre, Hedy here, too, deploys the mystical figure again and again, like a mantra, which coalesces the collection while adding a calming, meditative presence.

In the style of the best of Pop Art, the repetition also offers a sly commentary on the mass production of food, clothes and buildings that has left the world awash in identical icons, like lines of cereal-box logos on supermarket shelves. Or, the Brillo boxes and soup cans favored by Warhol, a mentor to Hedy, and a friend. Looked at another way, the sacred here comes down to earth, which may allow a whole new audience to tap the compassion espoused by the Buddha.

If these Buddhas have become symbols of an inescapable assembly line -- the cosmic treadmill that won’t let the world catch a breath -- Hedy also coyly neutralizes them putting them in lush, outdoor scenes. Surrounded by petunias, lilacs and hibiscus in a garden in East Hampton, where she worked and lived for years, and where a recent wedding of her son provided the inspiration for this show, the Buddha returns to its primitive, natural state.

Similarly, when the sculpture is graced with pink bougainvilleas and palm trees in Barbados, another provider of creative nourishment, the Buddha appears at peace, as if in repose under the same ancient fig tree that offered it enlightenment in the first place. Indeed, even where the vegetation is abstracted, these Buddhas, are smiling and beatific, buoyed by a rich palette of reds, purples and greens.

Unlike Hedy’s 1990s deities, which were set against vivid but more ethereal backdrops, these subjects are grounded in a reality that’s actual and not virtual, and that has little to do with faddish tech obsessions like micro-blogs, texts and tweets. While people may increasingly choose to fixate on the computers in their hands, these works remind of the importance of the natural world -- the touch of a leaf, the scent of a blossom -- that a screen can never deliver.

Born in Hamburg, Germany, and raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Hedy graduated from the Cooper Union, where she encountered the maximalist, full-canvas Abstract Expressionism that has shaped her style since.

But the artist, whose works have been exhibited at the Rubin, Hood and Vizcaya Museums, among others, and shown at Bridgewater Lustberg Gallery, Benrison Contemporary and Vered Modern, as well as internationally, has presciently been able to bend with the times, even getting ahead of public thought in a way that can seem obvious in retrospect.

Klineman’s “Fashion Portraits” of the 1980s, which mixed gold leaf, iridescent paint and celebrity apparel, like Michael Jackson’s black suede boots and a punk-era Blondie blouse and skirt, playfully channeled that era’s embrace of art and fashion, glamour and materialism. Appropriately, Andy Warhol’s eyeglasses also turned up in one of her memorable works.

And then, in the next decade, sensing that the mood was turning away from those somewhat synthetic priorities, Hedy wisely pivoted to her original series of Buddhas and paired them in silkscreens with exuberant Shivas and Ganeshes.

In the 2000s, when the nation elected its first African-American president, Hedy became fascinated with the spirituality of another place, Africa, and the masks of Gabon and the Ivory Coast, which revealed a common thread: What is worn to protect or thrill, whether an ancient mask or a punk-rock mini-skirt, can also help lift us from the drudgery of the here and now and perhaps let us come close to a Buddha-like transcendence.

Yet if there is any religious message in Hedy's past works and in her latest show, it should be understood as pantheistic; the artist has frequently emphasized that her beliefs are not exclusionary. And what better way to convey that point than to focus on the garden, which after all was where The Tree of Knowledge grew in the Old Testament.

Just as West meets East here, so, too, does Hedy neatly converge the sublime and the everyday, the personal and the political, as well as the many enchanting phases of her career.

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