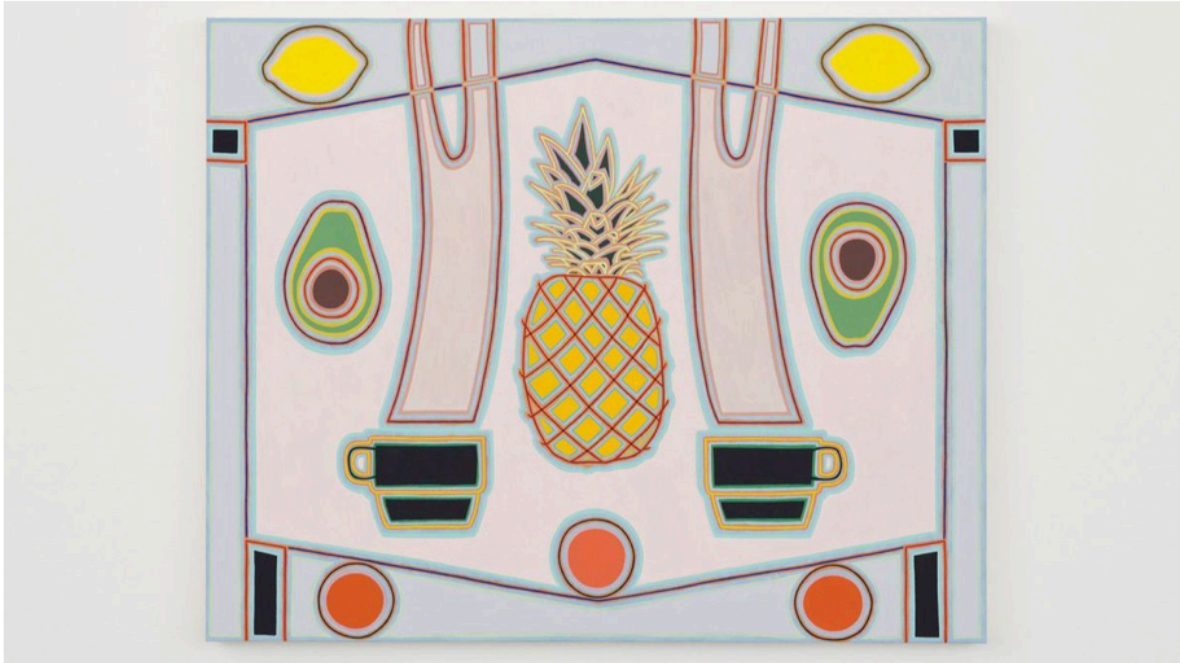


Los Angeles Times

REVIEW ARTS & CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT

In Holly Coulis' clever paintings, that avocado is more than an avocado

By DAVID PAGEL MAY 28, 2019 | 3:45 PM



Holly Coulis, "Pineapple and Coffees," 2019. Oil on linen, 40 inches by 50 inches. (Jeff McLane / From Holly Coulis and Philip Martin Gallery)

If selfies have become the most popular form of portraiture, why not start thinking of still-lives as stillies?

That's what Holly Coulis invites you to do at her casually thrilling exhibition at Philip Martin Gallery in Culver City. Made up of 10 midsize oils on linen, "Holly Coulis: Stilly" suggests that the painter, who was born in Toronto in 1968 and now lives in Athens, Ga., not only has reinvented a genre but also mastered her medium. With such eye-popping virtuosity, you can't help but smile while enjoying the ways she has brought an age-old format up to the minute.

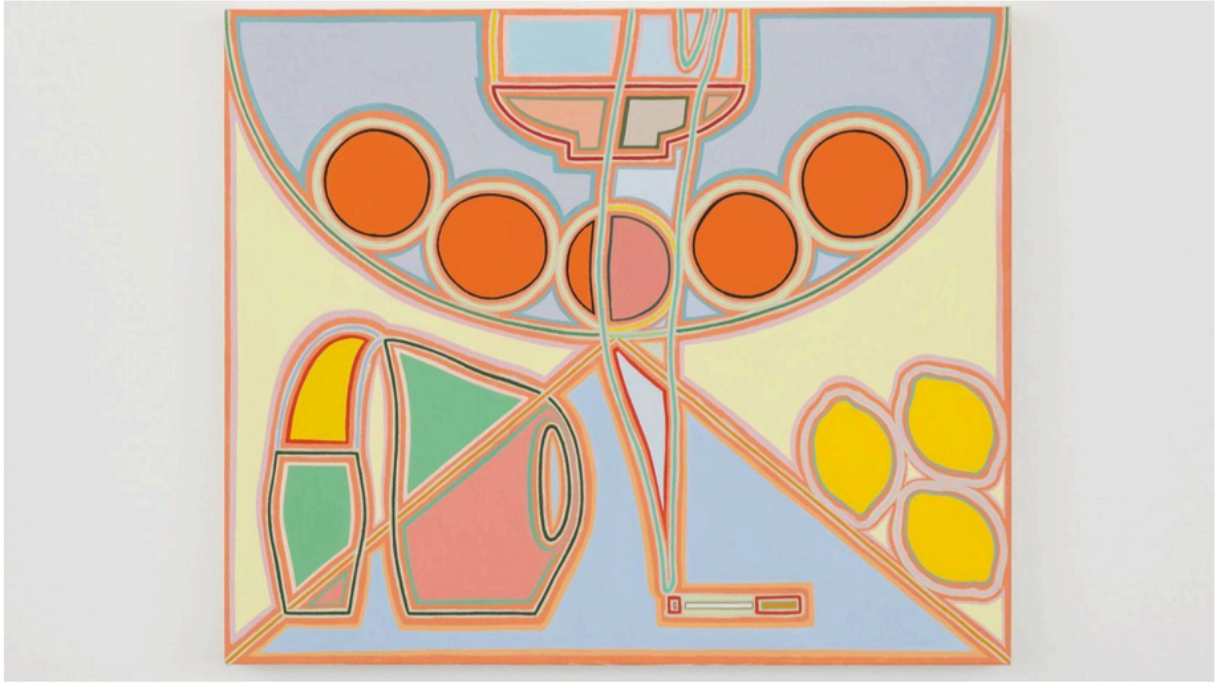
Still-life started with enjoyment, with the pleasures of looking at and savoring life's little pleasures — modest moments of respite from the daily grind. Coulis' pastel-tinted pictures deliver a cornucopia of such satisfactions.



Holly Coulis, "Potatoes, Grapes and a Lemon," 2019, oil on linen, 36 x 48 inches. (Jeff McLane / From Holly Coulis and Philip Martin Gallery)

Each looks great on a screen, the carefully calibrated combination of tertiary tints abuzz with the electrifying energy of Italian Mannerism. Wayne Thiebaud's great paintings of cafeteria desserts come to mind, as do Howard Arkley's deliriously beautiful interiors, Manny Farber's bird's-eye surveys of studio stuff and Paul Wonner's architecturally arranged setups. Each of Coulis' paintings looks even better in the flesh, its symmetry-skewing composition hitting just the right balance between harmony and happenstance. Nothing feels fussed over. Nor left to chance.

Every eggplant, bowl of soup, pitcher of lemonade, sliced avocado, glass of lager and bunch of grapes simultaneously struts its stuff and plays well with its neighbors. Pears, apples and wine glasses — as well as sunscreen and cigarettes — star in their own day-dreamy dramas.



Holly Coulis, "Lemonade and Smoke," 2019. Oil on linen, 25 inches by 30 inches (Jeff McLane / From Holly Coulis and Philip Martin Gallery)

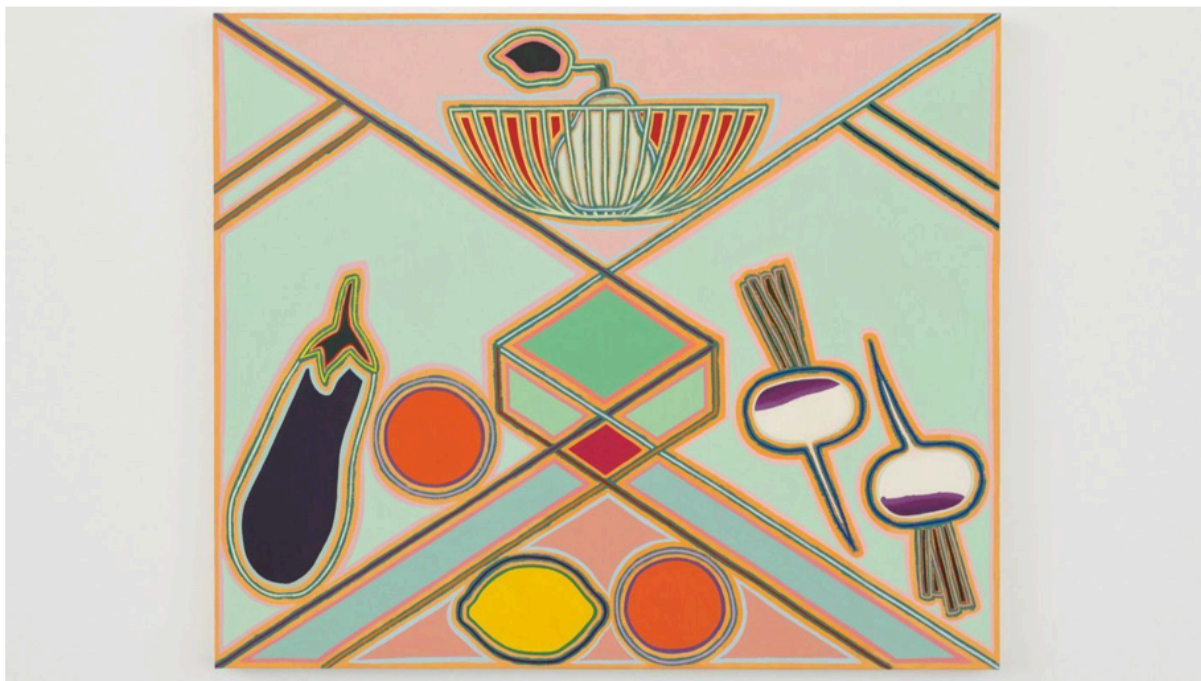
The best thing about Coulis' paintings is that you want to keep looking at them long after you've identified everything in them. That's because the objects Coulis depicts have the presence of mirages. Although each appears to have crisp contours or precise borders, their outlines swim in and out of focus, blurring and slipping and making each item seem to be hovering, just out of reach, in an intangible reality.

That's because there are no lines in Coulis' paintings. She never uses her paintbrush as a pencil. Instead, she paints big blocks of color over bigger blocks of color, leaving slivers of the previously painted blocks visible — like a slip peeking out from beneath a skirt.

That makes for objects that seem to play with perception. Coulis' mischievous paintings open a gap between what you think you know and what you experience.

The imagination springs into action, begging the question: If Coulis painted a landscape, would it be a landie?

Philip Martin Gallery, 2712 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through July 6. (310) 559-0100, philipmartingallery.com



Holly Coulis, "One Eggplant, Two Turnips," 2019. Oil on linen, 30 inches by 36 inches (Jeff McLane / From Holly Coulis and Philip Martin Gallery)