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ART IN REVIEW

Julie Heffernan

P.P.O.W.

476 Broome Street, SoHo

Littlejohn Contemporary

41 East 57th Street

Manhattan

Both through April 17

Painting in an impressive imitation of 17th-century high style, Julie Heffernan produces a magical mix of Old Masterism, Surrealism and post-modernist pastiche. At the center of most of her large, delirious allegories in this joint exhibition of new paintings, she portrays herself as the Infanta, the little girl in the famous Velazquez painting "Las Meninas." Usually nude but with the Infanta's big hair, she is a goddess of nature and intuitive vision surrounded by a fantastic panoply of objects, animals, primordial landscapes and hallucinatory miniature scenes.

Ms. Heffernan, a New Yorker in her early 40's, sometimes pictures herself as a child, male or female, and, in one case, as a circus strong-man. In "Self Portrait as Infanta With Flies," she is a grown woman holding up a salamander in one hand and with flies all over her other hand. Near her feet, tiny people play golf in a little Arcadian mountainscape. Elsewhere, dead chickens sprawl on an ornate old table and a small sculptured sea god points his trident at pearls scattered on the floor. Behind her looms a wall-size Baroque painting of naked women and babies at the edge of the sea.

You can imagine some feminists objecting to what might seem to be an embrace of female stereotyping, but there is knowing irony in Ms. Heffernan's cult of the archetypal feminine. And in any case, it's wonderful how she shrugs off orthodoxy to paint the freedom, fertility and comedy of her own zany imagination.

KEN JOHNSON