

January 2000

Julie Heffernan: *Landscape with Fountain of Youth*, 1999, oil on canvas, 52 by 60 inches; at Littlejohn Contemporary.



**Julie Heffernan at  
Littlejohn Contemporary  
and P.P.O.W.**

Julie Heffernan's paintings have become progressively more complex, decadent and theatrical. In this double show, a recent group of them presented the usual fruits, shamanistic objects, beasts, birds and flora, but Heffernan has become bolder. Her earlier still lifes, into which she set tiny vignettes or "thought bubbles," have evolved into highly detailed imaginary landscapes that often feature a nude or pair of nudes. The vignettes, instead of appearing in separate bubbles, are often assimilated into the landscape as scenes within scenes.

Her bizarre allegories quote, both in style and content, Renaissance and 17th-century paintings. Heffernan's figures have the artist's own features and often sport the ornate helmet of hair of the Infanta in *Las Meninas*. In her ironic pastiches of the Velázquez painting, Heffernan turns a depersonalized gaze onto her own surreal, fetishistic inner life.

The paintings have no key that will decode their complex pictorial language. One can only speculate as to the meaning of recurrent tropes such as red gemlike fruits (rolling on the ground like marbles or stacked up as offerings), or the red headgear lifted from van Eyck's *Man with a Turban* and refitted on a child's head, or the menagerie of animals on leashes. In *Landscape with Fountain of Youth* (1999), the central scene is a watering hole where putti dive and swim around two small adolescents mounted on dogs. All this is surrounded by numerous circular sideshows, including bare-chested heroes on horses fighting off wild bears, an offering of fruit and dead rabbits, and some Louis XIV furniture encircled by hedges. These micronarratives tend to overload the paintings, but Heffernan seems content to leave viewers bewildered rather than allow an easy—and ultimately reductive—clarity.

—Nicole Krauss