

JULIE HEFFERNAN

P.P.O.W.

Perhaps the most appropriate visual medium with which to address history and depict an excess of wealth is the one that has done so for centuries: painting. That's what came to my mind as I viewed Brooklyn-based Julie Heffernan's sumptuous oil portraits of herself as an elaborately coiffed woman bedecked in impossible skirts of exquisite pink blossoms, polished fruits, iridescent peacock feathers, and hefty masses of dead animals, their dark eyes liquid and staring. Here, allusions to the history of painting—soft, glowing 18th-century French roses, dimly lit 16th-century Dutch kitchen tables heaped with exotic game—evoke a heyday of royal patronage, colonial valor, and monarchical moral exemption. A strong link between today's neocolonialist free-trade policies and expansionist royal decrees of the past is undeniable, and these stunningly rendered works offer

many subtle readings (except for one overly jeering work, featuring hanging plates painted with images of the Bush administration wearing jester hats). Heffernan has been painting opulent and busily metaphorical self-portraits for the past 15 years, although unlike this 2007 series, they sometimes lacked a "self" in human form. Throughout these new works, the female subject, despite being nearly engulfed by the teeming riches cascading from her waist or piled on her head, is always straight-backed and serene. Looking out from her lavish tableau she seems (like so many of our present-day aristocrats) blithely unconcerned about the corpses at her feet. —LYRA LIBERTY KILSTON



JULIE HEFFERNAN, *SELF-PORTRAIT AS NOT DEAD YET*, 2007. OIL ON CANVAS, 68 X 60 IN. COURTESY P.P.O.W., NEW YORK.

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