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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: (NOTHING BUT) FLOWERS

by Andrea K. Scott



Henni Alftan, *Broken Flowers*, 2020.

“There is nothing you can see that is not a flower,” a haiku by Basho begins. Karma, the enterprising gallery and bookstore in the East Village, takes those words to heart in an uncommonly good summer show (through Sept. 13) with a simple conceit: floral paintings by fifty-nine artists. The gallerist Brendan Dugan is also an accomplished book designer (a catalogue, with essays by Hilton Als and Helen Molesworth, is coming soon), and the visual intelligence of the exhibition, the flow and the syncopation of images, delivers almost as much pleasure as the paintings themselves. The arch melancholy of “Broken Flowers” (above), from 2020, a study in opacity and transparency by the Finnish-born Parisian newcomer Henni Alftan, becomes sharper and stranger in the intimate company of Susan Jane Walp’s trance of a still-life—blueberries offset by a hollyhock blossom—from 2000, which opens into the lemon joys of a Peter Doig oil on board, from 1989. Sometimes flowers mark mourning. In 2017, Jennifer Packer painted a lush, nearly abstract arrangement in green, blue, and gold, to honor Sandra Bland, who died in a Texas jail. The picture’s title is as intensely simple as any haiku: “Say Her Name.”