

Colette at Eugenia Cucalon

Colette has been charming the world since the early '70s with works that excerpt her life, include herself, revive outmoded styles of painting, dress and behavior, allude to her boudoir, and operate as a continual commentary on style, art and life. Her most recent New York show was not, therefore, a surprise, but it was certainly a pleasure.

For the last four years Colette has assumed the identity she calls, almost regally, the House of Olympia. The artist's charm is revealed in *Olympia's Simple Rules*, which were painted on one wall of the gallery: 1. Retrieving my History. 2. Bringing Back Chivalry and Good Manners. 3. Innocence and Romance. 4. Art that elevates the Spirit and Celebrates Life. 5. Matches the Furniture and 6. Revives Portraiture.

The Cucalon gallery (where Colette had a show in 1977 as well) is one floor above the street, from where, through a large plate-glass window, it is possible to see into the gallery. Colette dressed this window to be seen both from the street and also from inside the gallery. She draped it with satin in various colors, predominantly yellow; standing near the window was a "mannequin sculpture" of Colette herself, wearing her own gorgeous costumery of an indeterminate bygone age, in this case a pink satin, floor-length gown decorated with feathers. The

mannequin performed Colette herself. As such it was unlike Colette—rigid, unsmiling, static, mute (although Colette has often made personal appearances in her environments without relating to viewers). The mannequin stood next to a gilt-framed antique chair and near a painting by Colette in the style of Fragonard. Behind the chair was a small work framed in satin that is like a detail of the same "Fragonard." Though inspired by the 18th-century artist, both works are pure Colette. The rest of the show included a few paintings and some shrinelike, fabric-and-wood wall pieces of Olympiana.

As an environment, the latest show had a somewhat homey air (the gallery is not vast, and it has a fireplace). The works, although of course related, were more separate and discrete than in Colette's previous shows. It was clearly intended

to be decorous, in the full meaning of this neglected word: seemly, appropriate and classy.

—Frederick Ted Castle

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Colette: Installation view, 1996; at Eugenia Cucalon.