

## Colette at Egizio's Project

Since the 1970s, Colette has identified herself as the mistress of the multiple worlds she occupies: performative installations and their relics, which she refers to as "houses," in the tradition of the couturiere. In this exhibition, "Erasing My History," Colette appeared in her newest incarnation as the chatelaine of the Maison de la Lumière, carrying at her waist the emblematic key identifying her exalted office. The artist has previously taken the roles of several powerful and notorious women associated with

sexuality and the demimonde: Mata Hari, Sade's Justine and Manet's courtesan Olympia, among others. Maison de la Lumière follows in that lineage: like its predecessors, the Maison is the present incarnation of her Lower Manhattan studio.

From within its ornamented walls, Colette looks out on her triumphs as a designer of sets and costumes for the opera in Berlin and as the creator of a self-referential line of clothing for Fiorucci. She has posed as Frida Kahlo and as subjects from paintings by Botticelli and Boucher, costumed appropriately and attended by attractive young men. She continues to make time for cameo appearances as the author and sometimes subject of what she calls Colettesized portrait photographs, ornamented and stitched, drawn upon and painted.

During her reign as Olympia, Colette attempted to retrieve her history, and presented photographs of her past in various forms, often very large, in installations swathed with ruched fabric. In a "permanent salon" established in Berlin in the late '90s she presented *The Living Library*, dedicated to her own history captured in a variety of mediums. But in this recent New York exhibition at Egizio's Project, which traveled to Carol Johnssen Gallery in Munich, she presented 26 works from "Erasing my History." The title seems to allude to the dictum of the Yaqui sorcerer, Juan Matus, in the writings of Carlos Castañeda, who insists that his student erase personal history to experience total freedom.

A 4-by-5-foot altered photograph, *The Entrance to Lumière* (1996-2000), is appropriately architectural. Colette appears surrounded by an aura of the detritus of her studio—key chains, bits of hardware, tiny toys, charms—crowned with the fractured halo of an oval frame. In many of the smaller photographs, spangled with glitter and lustrous with clear polymer, she carries out the sorcerer's instructions: the paintings within these painted photos have been obliterated with a monochrome layer of pigment, their subjects erased. Here and there Colette remains in the room like a wit-

ness, appearing at a window, looking out between the fabric hangings, contemplative, waiting, anxious, perhaps a little triste, a scattering of eradicated paintings installed salon style on a flanking wall.

A solitary installation featured the lifelike Colette mannequin in a gown of silver lamé with a self-portrait, *The New Me* (2002), facing *Portrait with Light* (2001) as before a mirror. In both, Colette carries roses and the key of the chatelaine.

—Edward Leffingwell

Colette: *Premonition*, 1999-2001, mixed mediums on linen, 16 by 20 inches; at Egizio's Project.

