

Geys that are most easily forgotten. Irrespective of his age, I do feel these paintings exist where life edges into death, and perhaps even have something to tell us about the oceanic force and mystery of that event. It is one thing to see a work made late in an artist's life as commissioned by death, and quite another when you feel you are being called to from the other side. Ghostly? Posthumous? One can't explain this. In *The Philosophy of Music*, Theodor Adorno writes, "Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art, and thus it has appeared in art only in a refracted mode, as allegory. . . . Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself." It is a mystery—one of the many this show induced me to think about: what causes despair, what causes us to lose a sense of constancy, and what causes jubilation. These are the most mysterious things I know, and they certainly don't come from the places that conventional wisdom tells us they do. Bubble wrap is not a substance thought to contain a deep interior life, yet I entered these paintings and found evidence of just that. One might have arrived at this show and seen an artist consigned to packing up his paintings, and think gloom had descended. But I left with those three painted dots and the words *life, life, life*.

—Robert Snowden

## Quintessa Matranga

### QUEER THOUGHTS

The recurrent motif in "Me at 3AM," Quintessa Matranga's recent show of seven small, anxious oil paintings, was a thick quilted comforter, which acts as a barrier between a human figure and the ominous, threatening world that she inhabits. Painted on the New York-based artist's bedroom floor, these small, deliberately impoverished works of teen surreality summon a youthful, sequestered world. In *Sleeping in My Dreams* (all works 2017), a bed is hoisted into a black night sky; sandwiched between the mattress and a comforter is a young woman, secured in place by a chain. She is elongated and ill-proportioned, while her face and poker-straight hair are brought about through a childish painterly style—the oil paint in these areas is dry, crumbly and gingerly applied, creating the effect of a school painting made with acrylics.

The paintings that most readily invoke a psychic or dream space are those rendered in a spectral style—the fragile characters who inhabit their thin, wavering atmospheres also convey a sense of precarious youth. *True Story* is another bed scene, this time set in a queasy green

environment, in which another female figure lies in the center of a mattress flanked by two pairs of calmly resting cockroaches, their insect legs politely folded in front of their thoraxes. This woman's too-long arms and giant hands stretch down in front of her with a kind of openness, which calms the alarm in the image, while evoking the curiously accepting nature of dream logic. *Sitting on a Strawberry* features a boy wearing a cap and earphones, resting on top of a giant berry with a skeletal rib cage, spine, and pelvis and an emoji-like heart; despite the bizarre circumstances in which he finds himself, he simply smiles cutely, unfazed. In *Indigestion*, however, a prone figure's stomach has turned into curdling green waves, powerfully implying the sense of losing one's bodily integrity through nausea.

Matranga's works are the fragile children of "bad painting," but she introduces formal shyness to that mode of self-aware naïveté. The careful, guileless handling of several of the small figures conveys an anxious preciousness rather than a sense of freedom. In this way the work is less a display of a de-skilled anti-aesthetic, and more about conjuring a sense of contingent painterly weakness. Along these lines, the comforter as a symbolic device suggests that these are tender, threatened characters in need of comfort and safety. Who could possibly criticize such easy prey, these poor things, poor millennials? In such a way, the paintings wield vulnerability as a weapon: perhaps one of the only exclusive weapons available to a generation who see themselves inhabiting a stripped world, with limited access to space, capital, infrastructure. It remains to be seen whether such meekness is a passing style for the young, or if Matranga and her generation suggest a way of reflecting on and making use of powerlessness.

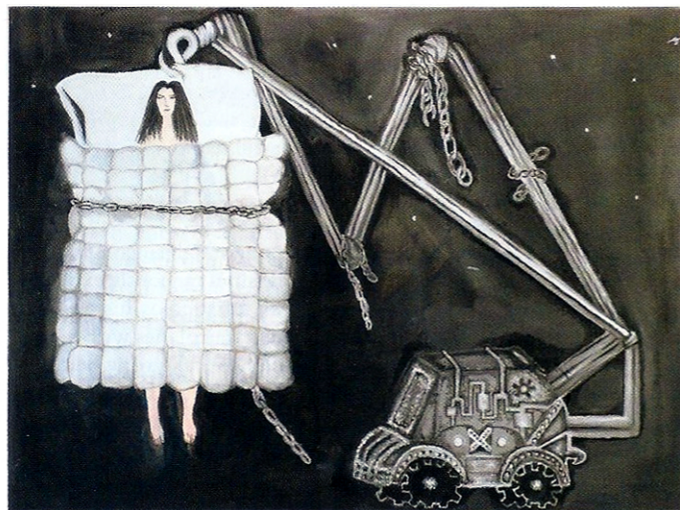
—Laura McLean-Ferris

## Maureen Gallace

### MoMA PS1

"Clear Day," Maureen Gallace's serene and dazzling retrospective at MOMA PS1, spans twenty-five years and includes more than seventy small oil paintings, though it seems there might be more like seven hundred of them, winding through the exhibition's second floor in an airy parade. As you wander from room to room, the succession of white walls dramatizes not just the light-flooded intensity of Gallace's canvases and their compact proportions (which hover around the intimate, sketch-book scale of nine by twelve inches), but the inexhaustibility and expansiveness of her narrow project. The artist always depicts views of an ambiguous New England countryside or coastland (and sometimes bouquets of flowers) in a fast, smart style—Fairfield Porter with a dash of Karen Kilimnik. Gallace walks a tightrope, balancing her compositional agility and tasteful color schemes with savvy carelessness and simulated naïveté, expressed as ungainly passages of squishy paint or picture-book vistas that verge dangerously on a kind of paint-by-numbers harmony. In other moments, her jarring omissions—notably of windows—evoke another variety of amateurism, an out-of-place formalism; abstraction gone awry; a strange, even intriguingly callous misunderstanding of the sentimental import of her bucolic-postcard subject matter.

*Christmas Farm*, 2002, is an extreme example. In it, frigid sun illuminates a trio of featureless brick-red buildings, their peaked roofs and the surrounding ground blanketed with pristine snow. If you squint, the painting's floating geometry (disregard the pale-blue sky and blobby olive-green foliage in the distance) is almost Malevichian. And if you don't squint, you might wonder what terrible things are going on inside the ominously pretty, no-escape structures of this haunted compound they call the Christmas Farm. Gallace's slate-gray, antique-white,



Quintessa Matranga,  
*Sleeping in My  
Dreams*, 2017, oil on  
canvas, 18 x 24".