

artillery

GALLERY ROUNDS: Claudia Keep

Parker Gallery

by Sebastian Zinn | Dec 20, 2023



Claudia Keep, "Coyote Club, 8:52 PM," 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery.

As with many works of contemporary art, Claudia Keep's compact paintings first entered my field of vision on social media, where her imagery retains its appeal, even as her textured, varicolored and economical brushstrokes are flattened out. Keep often makes blunt close-ups of New England's less glamorous insects, setting their tiny bodies against monochrome grounds. She can drop the viewer down to a child's perspective, laying us out on our bellies, so low that our knees, elbows and eyes are cushioned in the grass. In *Last Guest at the Birthday Party* (2023), Keep rests our cheek against a synthetic gingham tablecloth, so we may better observe the airy, paper mâché wings of a small, white moth.

Through the repetitive execution of a single type of mark, Keep renders fleeting phenomena—like a sunset driving shafts of light through a stand of trees, snowfall curving around a speeding car's windshield like a dome, and the distortion that ripples effect on figures submerged in water. These works will appeal to nostalgics like myself who start missing experiences before they're over and people before they're gone.

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PARKER GALLERY

“Almanac,” an exhibition of Keep’s latest, squarish paintings, includes several works that engage in animism—an apparent addition to the artist’s standard repertoire of naturalistic motifs. *Coyote Club, 8:52 PM (2023)* a catasterism in action, shows three connect-the-dots horses assembled from star patterns rushing across the Milky Way. My favorite among these, however, depicts a five-pointed star just above our heads, trailing comet tails in a wooded thicket. Its title, *Parking Lot Star (2023)* lends the work a pleasurable equivocality: either we are glimpsing the ascent of a supernatural manifestation through the darkening canopy, or we’re admiring a hum-drum, electric light decoration suspended in the wood beside a twilit parking lot. Even modest artworks such as this can play on the fallibility of our senses and the limits of our reason.