

REGEN PROJECTS

Farago, Jason. "Galleries: Silke Otto-Knapp." *The New York Times* (February 3, 2017) p. C20 [ill.]

The New York Times

SILKE OTTO-KNAPP

Through Feb. 25. *Mary Boone Gallery, 541 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 212-752-2929, maryboone-gallery.com.*

Two years ago, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto presented an assured, challenging mid-career retrospective of the German painter Silke Otto-Knapp, whose landscapes and interior scenes are rendered in whispering shades of gray and silver. Ms. Otto-Knapp's first North American exhibition since then, at Mary Boone Gallery in Chelsea, is smaller but, in its way, quietly rebellious.

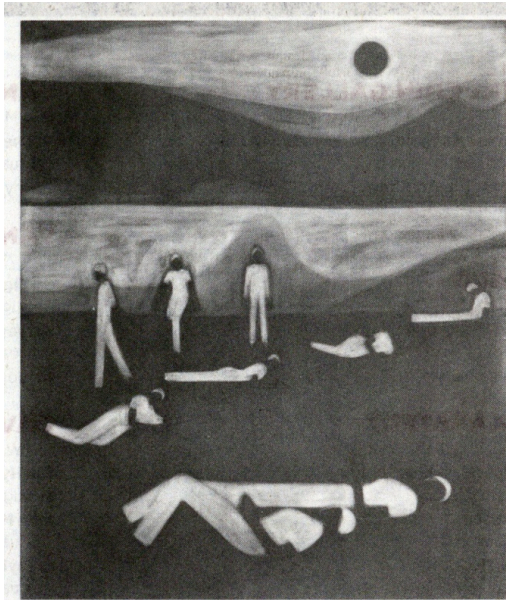
The artist, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, paints unadorned coastal scenes, pared down to pale washes over carbon-dark backgrounds, as well as figures drawn from dance: in this case, the works of the British choreographer Frederick Ashton. She renders the Ashton moves in repeated elementary sequences across multiple canvases, sometimes by the seaside, sometimes in empty space. The dancers' blank faces are topped by strange white coverings: perhaps bathing caps, perhaps wimples.

Ms. Otto-Knapp's unorthodox deployment of watercolor on large canvases — the largest, a luxurious seascape of twin bays in the moonlight, is 20 feet across — allows her to saturate her grisailles with chromatic variation even as their surfaces remain uncompromisingly flat. Up close, the weave of the canvas ripples through the dancers and the water; moonlit rocks are rendered with coats of light grays that let dark ones beneath bleed through. (The paintings are hung only a few inches off the ground, rather than at eye level, which keeps them from feeling too imposing.)

As in Toronto, the landscapes exhibit the greatest intricacy: the half-lit double bays in that 20-foot panorama, or the abraded gray coastline in a smaller landscape, have a nocturnal strangeness that makes them appear both realist and otherworldly. The stick-figure dancers unsettle in their own way, though Ms. Otto-Knapp's quotations of Ashton and other modernist heroes seem, at this point, a crutch she could do without.

Though she shares her exiguous palette with other leading figurative painters, notably Luc Tuymans and Marlene Dumas, Ms. Otto-Knapp is a more emotionally complex artist than those reliably gloomy artists. Her paintings' muffled beauty chimes more with the terse poetry of Louise Glück, or the pared-down records of Radiohead.

JASON FARAGO



SILKE OTTO-KNAPP AND MARY BOONE GALLERY, NEW YORK, AND GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, NEW YORK/ROME