

WIDEWALLS

In Conversation with James Salomon on the Latest Exhibition He Curated at Carol Corey Fine Art

Exhibition Reviews, Interviews
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"Loneliness can be unbearable, especially when we are not alone," opens *She then turned away.*, an experimental short story underpinning the latest exhibition by occasional curator and writer James Salomon at Carol Corey Fine Art in the posh lakeside getaway of Kent, CT. "It had been a long, rugged journey, she dropped her bags on the rug to sit on the sofa."

For the occasion, Salomon sought a co-curator in Benoist F. Drut — proprietor of premier New York City-based French Art Deco gallery Maison Gerard, who Salomon knows through his own career as Director of Design Projects at Achille Salvagni Atelier on Madison Avenue, making impossibly elegant homes even more fabulous. The duo's collaboration deftly blurs the oft-debated delineation between art and design, harmonizing otherwise disparate pieces like a powerful Kara Walker print alongside sumptuous works by local talents like Cynthia Wick, Richard Pasquarelli, John Gordon Gauld, Tina Scepanovic, Peter Gerakaris — and artists from Corey's roster. Salomon handled the walls and Drut the furniture, mostly from Maison Gerard.



Peter Gerakaris, Barry Blitt, Nicholas Howey, and Matthew Solomon, with furniture and accessories from Maison Gerard. Photo Walker Esner

Curating From Emotion

Throughout his fine art career, which started in 1999 when he began working with famed dealer Mary Boone, Salomon, who's operated his own eponymous gallery since 2006 out of East Hampton, then Chelsea, has consistently arranged exhibitions from sheer emotion, inspired by the media that resonates with him - beginning with the title of a poem or song. *Beautiful Strangers*, an outdoor exhibition Salomon assembled at the Berkshire Botanical Gardens years ago, began with a Kevin Morby track on repeat. Mark Mennin and Fitzhugh Karol, two artists from that event, also appear in *She then turned away.*, along with Ned Smyth, Toni Ross, Nicholas Howey, and William Stuart, whom Salomon knows from projects in the Hamptons.

Historically, Salomon's conceptual jumping-off points have proven, ironically, low. "*It usually starts from a place where I'm not feeling so hot,*" the curator remarked of his rhythms.

"*I wouldn't mind letting it go in other realms,*" he added, noting, "*I'd like to take on joy. Eventually.*"

This time, Salomon generated his own source material. "*I was the one creating the mood,*" he said. "*I don't know how it came about, but I thought of a woman who was deeply upset.*" Salomon wrote this open-ended, enigmatic story from that woman's point of view, a first for him. He wrote the introduction and conclusion but couldn't finish the body until he'd chosen the artworks. His story centers on the exhibition as a physical embodiment of the relationships anchoring this fictional tale's ephemeral protagonist. If there are answers to the questions her existence poses, the artworks alone hold the key.



Left: Alexis Rockman - Metro, 2006. / Right: Richard Pasquarelli - Hummel (from Relic series), 2020

Inspiration As Collaborator

Once Salomon had a mental image not only of Corey's gallery space but the ennui-laden scene he intended to set there, he then got to work coordinating the fine art resources at his disposal. In addition to the gallery artists, furniture, and high-end gems contributed from links within his network, Salomon made phone calls and studio visits to see the rich array of area artists he's acquainted with through his extensive experience. John Gordon Gauld, one of the visual minds behind Bergdorf Goodman's windows of the past decade, is a dear friend of Salomon's who's known throughout the Berkshires for his vibrant botanic idylls. Here, however, Gauld contributes a refined tempera composition of gold mirrors from the archive, rendered with real, reflective metal — signaling the protagonist's close relationship with Gauld, reflecting Salomon's own.

Alexis Rockman, based nearby, has a celebrated showup at Sperone Westwater on the Bowery in New York through July. For *She then turned away.*, he also contributes a deep cut: *Metro* (2006), featuring a flashier oil-painted color palette than his most recent glacial scenes currently on view in Manhattan. It is a slice of an apocalyptic Parisian composition, complete with a decayed Hector Guimard Art Nouveau subway entrance. Salomon has been working with Rockman for almost 15 years. "*More than half of these people I understand well enough to know their idiosyncrasies,*" Salomon said of the artists he organized for this show.

With the procurement part of his curating duties complete, Salomon then had to wait until all the artworks arrived to get hung in the space — some professionals work from drafted models, Salomon said, but that suffocates the fun. He prefers balancing planning with spontaneity. In the end, the show's long, salon-style wall ended up shaping most of the story surrounding Salomon's leading femme fatale, ridden with moments of levity but also potent introspection.

"*The first one I hung was the Kara Walker,*" Salomon said, which depicts rolling African American heads. "*I turned it into a memorial.*"

"She looked at the artwork with sorrow and humility," his story reads, "but it was something that she needed to live with."



Living room in *She then turned away*. Written and curated by James Salomon at Carol Corey Fine Art, Kent, CT. Photo Walker Esner

She Then Turned Away.

As such, viewers could consider *She then turned away* both the story and the exhibition as an intricate community collaboration — birthed in a moment of Salomon's own ruminations over the human condition, then scaled up and up to span diverse art practices, an art gallery, and even an affluent community, all under one single roof, one single narrative.

The story's first paragraph concludes that an amorphous 'he' was at the flower market — a real, bi-weekly extravaganza at Kent Barns. A "steely breeze" blows off the lake through the window — implying that even within Kent, she's got elevated means to sustain her epicurean lifestyle.

"And for some reason, she had to abandon it all," Salomon pointed out.

"It's best to leave this completely open-ended," he said of the story now. "Once you start explaining, the aspect of imagination is gone. Here, the reader can fantasize or draw their own conclusions based on their own story." The audience's impulse to assign and assess the source of this woman's anguish marks Salomon's most critical lesson from writing a female protagonist.

The curator's experimental spirit, his vulnerability, and commitment to translating archetypal experiences through unabashed authenticity elevate organizing *She then turned away* into an art form itself rather than simply a sterile checklist of objects available for purchase.

The emotions within Salomon's story lend the show novel import, but the biggest reason those emotions have teeth is because the viewer comes to understand on a deep level why the works in this show matter to his unnamed 'she.' "*I want to give a sense of empathy but also relatability, let the reader know we're all dealing with our shit, separately and together.*" Whether departing from cherished objets d'art, or beloved memories, or self-limiting beliefs that keep us safe — on account of lost love or dreams or life — we've all had to turn away, even if it hurts like hell.

"*There's no sequel to this,*" Salomon stated.

The exhibition *She Then Turned Away.* at [Carol Corey Fine Art](#) in Kent, CT, will be on view until July 9th, 2023.

Featured image: Kara Walker (center), Tim Nighswander, Tina Scepanovic lamps and Maison Gerard furniture and accessories. Photo Walker Esner