

SARAH MEYERS BRENT: IN THE GARDENCatamount Arts • St. Johnsbury, VT • catamountarts.org • Through August 17, 2018

Sarah Meyers Brent is a fan of sprawl. Whether working in painting, sculpture or installation, her art suggests explosion, excess, even waste. Reused clothes and rags are known to inhabit her mixed media paintings. Yet even her more traditional canvases express bountiful matter, both living and inert. In one recent show at a Boston gallery, Brent installed then tore open dry-wall to expose a waterfall of hanging fabric, color, pattern and foam. "I even sculpt like a painter," she says. As chaotic as Brent's art seems, it's still organized.

Her latest show, *In the Garden* at Catamount Arts, is not concerned with spectacular installations but rather paint-



Sarah Meyers Brent, *Ode to Pregnancy*, 2014, cloth, acrylic, mixed media/panel, 39 x 76". Courtesy of the artist.

ing. In examining the language of her brushwork, one might understand the central ethos of her art. Curator Katherine French has prepared a bouquet of Brent's botanical paintings, depictions which are abject yet somehow full of life.

Growth, decay and motherhood are frequent themes in the work. Brent's recent experience of birthing and raising two children have intensified the emotive impulse behind these themes. Her kids have also provided the raw materials of outgrown and used clothes that now vitalize her art as the add-ins of sand, dirt and twigs once did.

The canvases have a strong, albeit slow, sense of movement. Brent is particularly fond of

downward journeys; her paintings frequently drip and descend to a canvas' edge or bottom. Her brushwork often congeals or clumps together, arresting motion (and the viewer). The muted, dark palette of the large *Spring* isn't what one finds in a conventional "flower painting," but the weight and intensity of its brushwork absorb and allure.

Formally, Brent's work aspires to the visceral and tactile, a fitting complement to her conceptual concerns. There are morbid costates of disgust and wonderment in her paintings and installations. Beauty and repulsion fall, stumble, cascade and gush across these surfaces, forever tangled.

Consider *Ode to Pregnancy* and the exhausted-looking yellow foam lump that hangs over the canvas' boundaries. It references not only Brent's experience with high-risk pregnancy, but also her art's essential attitude toward life (human or plant). Here are delicate, exalted messes, thrashing about in worry and glory.

—Alexander Castro