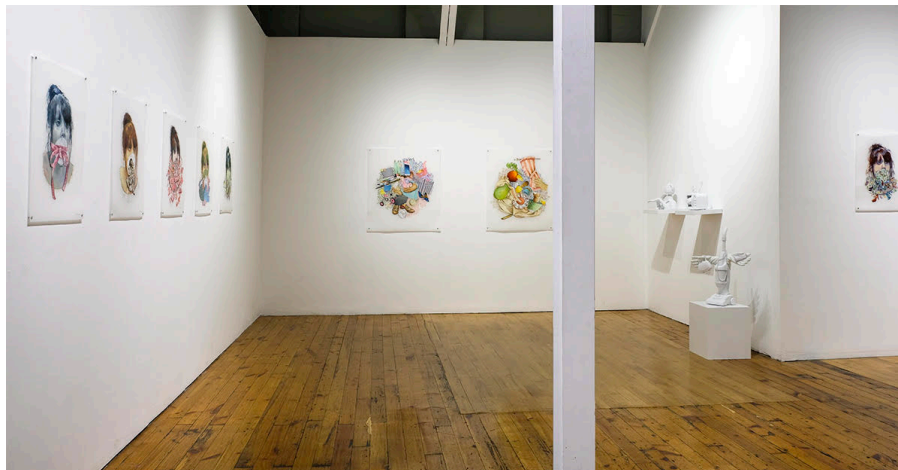


## Teri Donovan at Red Head Gallery

Looking at this series showing a beautiful young woman's face, our first impression is "oh, how lovely" – but soon we realize that we were misled.

A Toronto based artist, Teri Donovan is represented by the Red Head Gallery, where her latest solo show *Terms and Conditions* was displayed. Continuing the theme of her previous exhibitions: female identity, and timeless self-portrayal, the interaction of past and present are the main focus of this show. She presents us with a selection of intimate pieces, depicting a young woman's journey both in paintings and sculptures.



Installation view

Female identity is still a difficult issue. Donovan addresses the ideas, expectations and experiences of a young woman – maybe in her early twenties – growing up. Her personality is still being shaped, her identity just beginning to emerge. She is surrounded and heavily influenced by the social culture of her time, an idealized social fabric that still persists (even in the 21st century) with its demanding expectations of women in Western culture. There is an echo from the past and a pattern that seems to be cyclical. She is being conditioned to face the terms of society that she must meet, regardless of her personal interest or values.



Teri Donovan, *Tools of Engagement*, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

Most of Donovan's work deal with the past: legacies and memories; like the titles of her series *Legacies* and *An Archeology of Time* suggest. Childhood memories with their innocence are returning motifs in her paintings. Adult figures from the past appear, merge and then disappear as their time is over but their existence is still strong in the memories of the artist as is shown in her series, *Always, Once and Again*.



Teri Donovan, *Legacies*, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

Everything is personal for Donovan. All of her figures have a component of self-portrayal, and there is no question that the conscious mind digs deeply into the unconscious where suppressed memories wait to resurface. It is hard to say whether the young woman – the same face reappears in all these paintings – is happy or sad. Her eyes are large and they seemingly reach out to lock with ours. Her look and the items that cover the lower part of her face invite the viewer to create narratives. Who is she? What is her story? Do they show what she really wants to be or what is expected of her? Is it her true identity or one forced on her? Is it her true self or a juxtaposition of imagery that portrays the influences, actions and experiences she's gone through while constructing her personality?



Teri Donovan, Training, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

That brings time into the picture; creating a timeline that is overlapped by the past and mixed with the present. What is our time? How can our real life-time be defined? For Donovan, past is always an important part of it. As she refers to Simon Critchley's assertion that, "We might think we're done with the past, but the past isn't done with us." What if everything that we consider ourselves to be is just a cyclic repercussion of our past experiences, societal construction and culture? Can we ever be done with the past? Donovan's answer is a definitive NO. She believes that "what is absorbed and internalized in childhood is spoken and performed, consciously and unconsciously, in adulthood."



Teri Donovan, Shoe Dreams, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

This concept is strongly portrayed in the paintings with a touch of nostalgia and a whimsical vision. Sometimes the artist looks through pink lenses while other times she uses a more dramatic color code. The setting is rather melancholic, with the repetition of objects in a scattered representation. The images and objects tied to the young woman's identity, speak of a rather oppressed state, making this portrayal much more serious than it looks at first sight.



Teri Donovan, Decisions, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

The young woman's mouth is covered with a mask, made of a beautiful fabric, but still a mask that doesn't let her speak her mind. It is not coincidental that the series is titled, *What Speaks You*. It is not the woman who is speaking, but the objects that surround her. Are all her dreams about shoes (*Shoe Dreams*)? All the *Decisions* she can make merely about what to wear? We shouldn't be surprised after all, all the *Training* she got was about mermaids, make-up and baby strollers. Is it a surprise that she ends up with a *Reflection* no more than a selfie?



Teri Donovan, *Reflection*, oil and collage on Mylar, 24 x 18 in

While we hope not – since all these are gender stereotypes at their worst created by a male dominated society – it might not be out there for the women born in the 1950s but I believe that contemporary women could and should do better.

Life is a journey and these paintings invite us on an enchanting one. Resurrected memories like hunting dreams, with their vividness, are deeply interwoven into the fabric of our lives. There are times when they overshadow, even replace reality.

Ana Algarvio Alves & Emese Krunák-Hajagos

Images are courtesy of the artist

\*Exhibition information: September 4 – 28, 2019, The Red Head Gallery, 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 115, Toronto. Gallery hours: Wed – Sat, 11 – 5 pm.