

Right: *Remains* depicts a deteriorating domestic tableau writ large.

Below: Both wallpaper pattern and figure fade in and out of the scene (and metaphorically, memory) in Donovan's *It Happened One Night*.



## WORKS ON PAPER

The phrase “if these walls could talk” comes to mind when considering **Teri Donovan**. Those in her east-end Toronto studio would no doubt have much to say, covered as they are with little clippings of artistic inspiration—a collage that recently included visuals by the likes of Canadian painter Tony Scherman and Berlin-based street artist Evol—along with Donovan’s own in-progress pieces, which treat walls, and specifically, wallpaper, as a primary subject.

Over the past decade, the mixed-media painter has become known for creating images in which figures are encroached upon by intricately reproduced wallpaper patterns, like a family photo album whose memories are receding into the past even while they’re brought forth momentarily into the present. “I wanted to find a way to visualize time,”

Donovan says of the decision incorporate wallpaper motifs into her works.

“You can situate wallpaper in particular eras based on how it looks,” she says. “You can easily differentiate a modern wallpaper from [a style] from 30 or 40 years ago or something from the 1900s or much earlier.” In this way, Donovan has found an aesthetically striking metaphor for the importance of context within a larger narrative about time’s passing and its effect on remembrance.

“If you put wallpaper in a room, it’s not really the focus of anyone’s attention. It’s there to set the context of the room. But it’s a witness as well.”

The artist’s most recent pieces emphasize wallpaper treatments even more precisely, yet they also represent a broadening of her thematic palette—from portraying time’s association with individual identity

to commenting on its relationship with Western culture as a whole. *Hello?*, for example, depicts the evolution of communications technology in the form of old-fashioned arabesque panels, while *Aphrodite* incorporates the famous faces of the Greek goddess, Marilyn Monroe, Britney Spears and Lady Gaga in a design that speaks not only to modern ideas of beauty, but also to the ever-increasing rate at which such ideas now change. In this sense, while the past holds sway over the present, the present, in turn and with increasing rapidity, becomes part of the past. The future, of course, is an altogether different thing. What will Donovan make of it? Only time will tell. **E**

Learn more about Teri Donovan at [teridonovan.com](http://teridonovan.com). She is a member of Redhead Gallery (401 Richmond St. W., 416-504-5654; [redheadgallery.org](http://redheadgallery.org)).