

reviews: new york

Hope Atherton

Bortolami

In several of Hope Atherton's strangely alluring paintings shown here (all 2008), light disturbs subjects that seem accustomed to shadow. *Doll Hospital*, for one, features a demurely dressed woman sitting atop a mound of fabric. Her crossed legs dangle in a bright whiteness; her head is angled to avoid the light running along the side of the painting; and the white of one of her eyes glows just enough to lend an eeriness to her features, recalling Man Ray's photographs of the Marquise Casati. Also on view were two smaller versions of the painting with darker backgrounds, both of which were less dynamic than the larger work. *Danced for Any Celebration*, presenting what looks like an X-ray of a male figure holding a sword and a cigarette, was accompanied by a larger variation, in which the figure appeared dressed in black against a white background.

Narrative plays an important role in Atherton's paintings, but perspective and light are the artist's primary subjects. A large untitled canvas picturing a nighttime exchange between a man and a woman standing at an outdoor stall was unsettlingly dramatic by virtue of an unexpected light that encroaches from the bottom left of the canvas, and by a darkening sky. The ambiguity of the exchange forced the viewer to find a story in the painting's composition—the whiteness of the clothing, the uneven brushstrokes forming the ground, the flat black silhouettes of tree branches.

Face Jazz, another isolated night scene, shows a seedy building with the title words painted in multicolored flame lettering on either side of a wood door. Beneath the roof on one side, a foggy white light glows, illuminating a plant's

curling tendrils, the faint outline of trees in the background, and dark, ward slabs leading up to the door.



Hope Atherton, *Doll Hospital*, 2008, oil and acrylic on linen, 84" x 60". Bortolami.

lone structure in the darkness is foreboding yet tempting. Like much of Atherton's work, the image is strongly evocative of something that hovers on the edge of consciousness.

—Sandra Ban