

Pandora's Children

10/10/14 - 12/6/14

Curated by

Lauren Kennedy

Donna Smith

Laura Gray Teekell McCann

featuring work by:

Whitney Sage

Emily Chase

Jen Baker

Carrie DeBacker

Meghan Bean

Joshua Brinlee

Georgann Demille

Sondra Perry

Jeanne Vockroth

Margaret Meehan

Gabriel Dawe

Hamlett Dobbins

Bruce Lee Webb

Melissa Dunn

Heyd Fontenot

Clough-Hanson Gallery at Rhodes College

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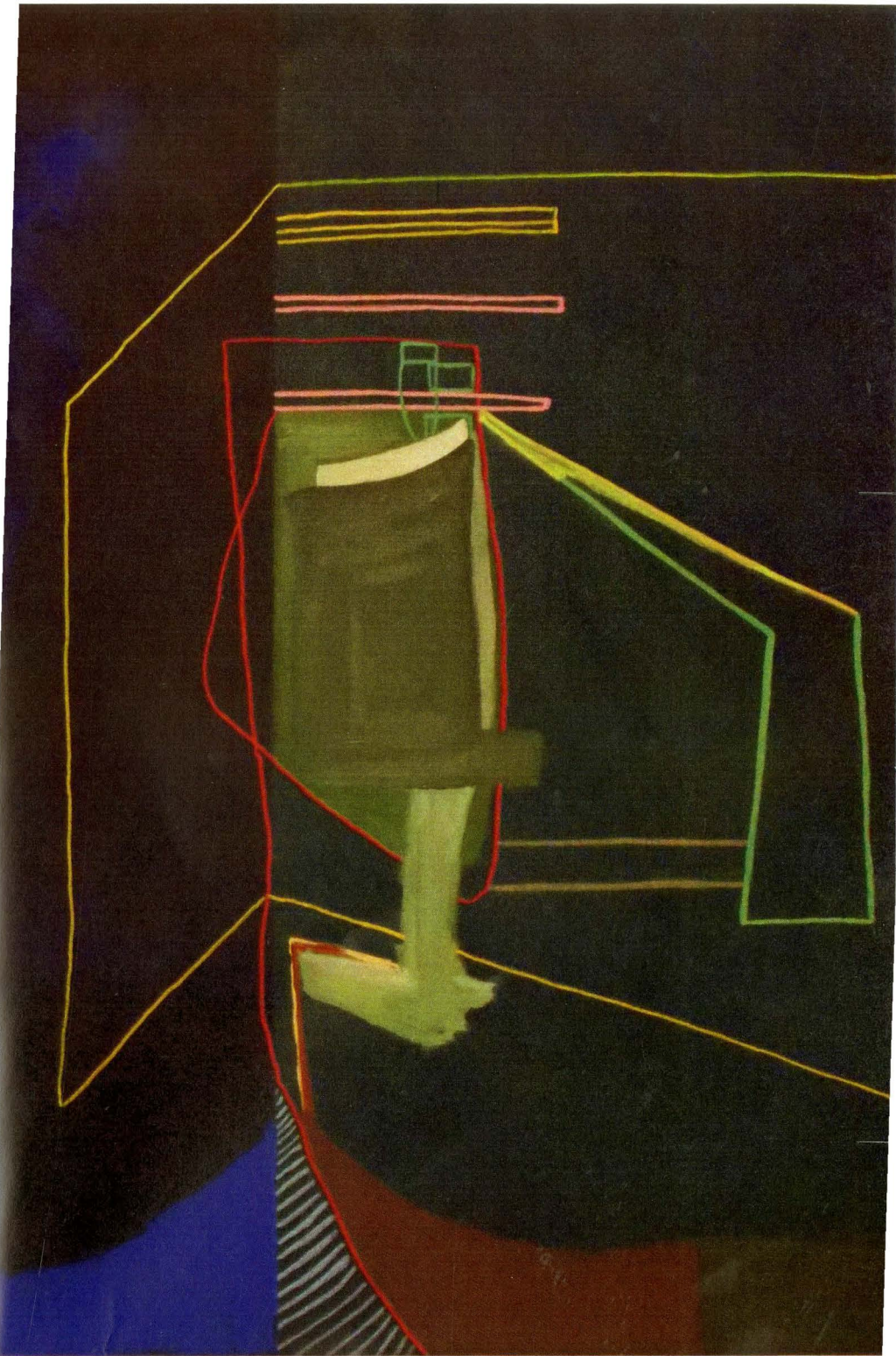
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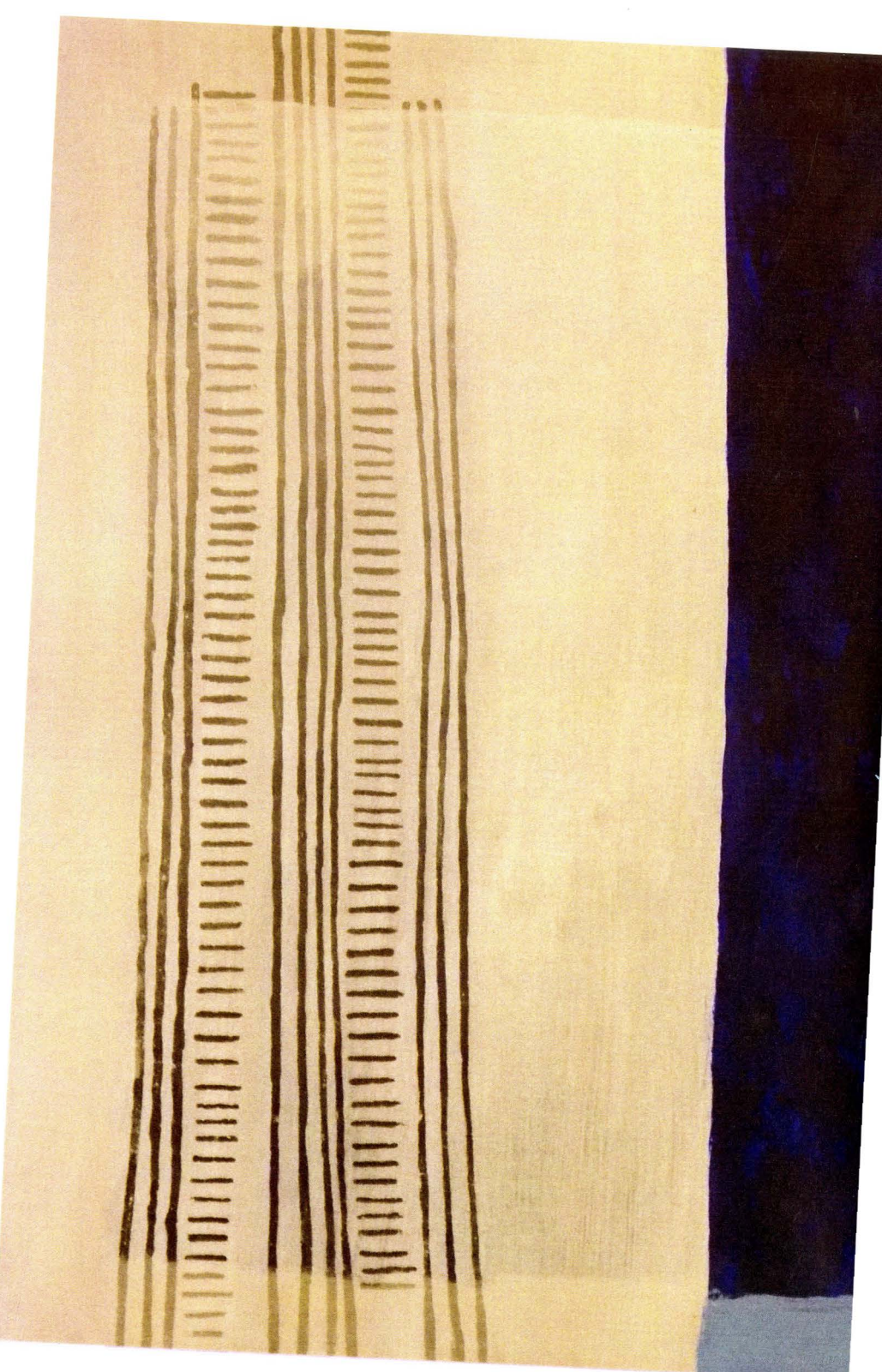
Margaret Meehan, *The Barmburners II*, 62 of 76, 2012

Whitney Sage, *Ruin Porn Series II*, 2010





Melissa Dunn, Last Week of April, 2013



Pandora's Children

In a time when women's rights and bodies are contested and embattled all over the world, including in places where their equality once seemed assured and their bodies were thought to be protected, it's tempting, and at times depressing, to read the history of feminism in a linear way. Time passes, wave follows wave, the movement advances and retreats, with ground gained and lost again. If not linear, our understanding of feminism is often tethered to places that do us no favors, like the battlefield (*another blow struck*) or the market (*they're not buying it*). But what if feminism was understood not via metaphors of linear progress, and not as situated in hostile territories, but via some form of radical redemption? The myth of Pandora might point in this direction.

According to the most common understanding of this myth, Pandora is the first woman, created by the gods and gifted with "feminine" traits, including a deceptive mind and tiresome desires. When Pandora's curiosity (which we are meant to find naive) prompted her to open the box that Zeus had given her as a wedding present, the evils contained within it spilled out and filled the earth. Only hope remained in the box, out of nascent humanity's reach. An equitable eye might read this myth differently. We might call her feminine traits by other names; cunning and ambition, for example. We might find her curiosity brave, an affront to cruel and manipulative powers. We might see that some evils, when viewed from another perspective, look something like rights. We might find her box to be not a prison that keeps hope from us, but a pantry that stores it on our behalf. Above all of this, we might come to know Pandora as a demonstration of the potential of female power to irrevocably change the course of human history¹.

Working from this understanding of feminism as a power that grows and expands ever outward from the broken seal on Pandora's box, we have invited three women to present their perspectives on feminism in the gallery. Lauren Kennedy is the

Partnership Manager at Ballet Memphis and the director of a gallery called Southfork, which is located in her Memphis apartment. Donna Smith is an Academic Advisor and Provost Lecturer at the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas, the director of an alternative gallery in Fayetteville, AR called The Shed, and the co-author of a regional art news site called NWA Art Talk. Laura Gray Teekell McCann is the research assistant at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens here in Memphis. The understandings represented here by Kennedy, Smith, and Teekell emerge from different lived experience, and so necessarily make different uses of feminism and the art it enables. Each has approached the exhibition with a singular set of expectations, experiences, and ideas, resulting in an exhibition that reflects the richly textured and, at times, cacophonous conversations around feminism today.

In the spirit of Pandora, first woman, reviled or revered, we want to make the claim that this gallery is a box of gifts and terrors as well. What ideas will be released from this place through the work of three curators with Pandora-like curiosity? What feminisms will be visited upon the communities around us? What will refuse containment? What hope will remain?

Joel Parsons
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

I'm deeply indebted to Rebecca Solnit's book Men Explain things to Me for pointing me toward this understanding of feminism

Joshua Brinlee, Siren Song 3, 2013

