

ARTFORUM

“Charles Mayton” AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

by Marco Tagliafierro
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View of “Charles Mayton: Tableau Table Tavolo,” 2015.

Visitors to Charles Mayton’s solo show at the American Academy in Rome first encounter four paintings, all the same size. Two depict an enormous bunch of purple grapes that competes with two gigantic eyeballs to dominate the pictorial space. The two other paintings, installed between these works, employ two different forms of Abstract Expressionism, one tending toward a vague idea of spatial architecture constructed through various brushstrokes, and the other with brushstrokes that come together in a strongly gestural manner. Continuing through the exhibition, one encounters several overturned fruit boxes, whose bottoms become an ideal canvas on which the painter depicts grotesque-mask designs that seem to portray the god Bacchus. Other works have interweavings of white surfaces into which a wooden spoon is inserted, the concave end of which is densely painted, as if it were presenting a miniaturized version of large paintings.

Finally, there is another series of five paintings, abstractions again, except in one case, where there is a representation of mythological figures against a geometric background with strongly contrasting colors. Historical references jump out when one least expects them. The works condense the history of painting in Rome, from classical times to the 1930s Scuola Romana of Scipione (aka Gino Bonichi) and Mario Mafai to the Pop art of Tano Festa and the Transavanguardia. It is as if Mayton has produced “condensers” capable of concentrating this millennial history through a linguistic triangulation of tableau, table, and tavolo (also the title of the show), so that the table is a work table but also the dining table on which painting is consumed.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

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