

ARTFORUM

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Mira Schor,
The Painter's Studio,
2020, ink, acrylic, and
gesso on tracing
paper, 9' 11" x 19'.



Mira Schor

LYLES & KING

Perhaps you know of Mira Schor as an alumna of the legendary “Womanhouse” exhibition of 1972, a coeditor of the journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* (1986–96, 2002–16), and the author of *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (1997) and *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life* (2009). Or perhaps you recognize her from Twitter, where she regularly weighs in on current events and retweets various left-leaning blue-check accounts. “Tipping Point,” a selection of works Schor made over the course of the Trump presidency, reflected the difficulty in reconciling the discrepant velocities of these parallel roles. So much can change in the time it takes paint to dry. Schor began planning the exhibition in September, before anyone could comfortably predict the outcome of the election. When it opened on January 8, would “Tipping Point” be a time capsule or a status update?

The synchronization of painting and politics is a subject of ongoing concern. In 1973, the year after the “Womanhouse” show, T. J. Clark published *Image of the People*, his searching account of Gustave Courbet’s decisive impact in Paris following the 1848 Revolution. “What enables an artist to make effective use of a certain schema or the formal language of a certain artist of the past?” Clark asked. “There is nothing unchanging or automatic about this.” The centerpiece of “Tipping Point” was the nineteen-foot-long *The Painter’s Studio* (all works cited, 2020), which derived its title and setting from Courbet’s *The Painter’s Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life, 1854–55*. In Courbet’s expansive, much-interpreted tableau, the artist sits before an easel surrounded by members of his bohemian circle and a host of figures representing a cross-section of French society. For her rendition, Schor eliminated most of scene’s ancillary characters and supplanted its mottled-brown background with a vast swath of dark-blue acrylic on tracing paper (reminiscent of the single saturated hue that blankets Henri Matisse’s *The Red Studio*, 1911). Gone, too, is the Oedipal triangle at the center of Courbet’s canvas—the patriarchal painter, an admiring young boy, and a nude female model—replaced by a cartoonish avatar of Schor

herself at work on a picture while being observed over her shoulder by a giant floating phallus.

In an era when an appreciable percentage of internet traffic is monopolized by dick pics, Schor is overdue for recognition as a virtuoso of dick painting. She is a master interpreter of the throbbing, the threatening, the ridiculous, and the rampant. Comparatively speaking, the disembodied dick in *The Painter’s Studio* is lackluster, a squat shaft engulfed by an inflated scrotum. Its force and significance derive mainly from its color, a toxic approximation of the former president’s tanning-bed-and-bronzer complexion. This hue crops up throughout the exhibition like Cheeto smudges on a suede couch, a visual instantiation of how pervasive Trump’s presence has been these past four years. In *Justice*, 2018, the scales of justice are held shakily aloft by a hollow-eyed orange specter who appears to be both burning and bleeding. One of Schor’s cursive-script paintings asks, in citrus skeins, WHAT KIND OF ART WILL WE MAKE UNDER FASCISM?

For *New York Times Intervention* (*Straight to Hell*, August 9, 2020), Schor spread orange gouache over a caricature of Trump that ran on the cover of the *Times*’s Sunday Review last summer. The piece is the exhibition’s sole example of Schor’s semiregular habit of wielding her brush to comment on or “correct” the newspaper’s notorious euphemisms and false equivalencies. Most of Schor’s *Times* paintings enter circulation through photographs posted to Instagram—a clever means of hitching her studio practice to the news cycle. Yet however much Schor manages to quicken painting, the medium keeps playing the long game. It endures, witnesses, outwits, and outlasts. In a conversation with historian Charlotte Kent, Schor acknowledged that she chose to undertake *The Painter’s Studio* in part because, at seventy years old, she may not retain the physical capacity to handle large-scale compositions much longer. Directly across from *The Painter’s Studio* hung *After the Party’s Over*, 2020, an equally massive canvas that likewise depicts a studio, this time in buttermilk white. An open book on the floor reads HISTORY. Two frames on the wall bear the words A LIFE and PAINTING. Schor herself has left the room.

—Colby Chamberlain