

# ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

## MAMIE TINKLER

Mamie Tinkler talks about everyday strangeness and resisting the painterly gesture

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Mamie Tinkler, *Pool*, 2020, watercolor and gouache on paper mounted to board, 17 1/2 x 16".

*Mamie Tinkler has painted intimately scaled, meticulously observed watercolor still lifes for over fifteen years. The Memphis-born, New York-based artist's tenaciously analog study of everyday objects—dishware, drapery, decorative keepsakes—evokes a Morandian quest disenthralled from traditionally gendered and abstemious formalist hierarchies. At a juncture that is challenging us to unlearn the desire for the remote and spectacular, Tinkler's work stretches our capacity for perceiving what's at hand. Her solo New York debut, at Ulterior Gallery, was shuttered at the outset of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders but is viewable virtually and by appointment through May 31.*

**SOMETIMES WE CAN BE ATTRACTED TO THINGS** that we don't wholeheartedly embrace. A rendering of a rose is a little bit of a joke about mastery. It's also joking about femininity, and I think that can't be overlooked in my work. While there is a feminine tendency, there's also a humorous distance from the feminine and what that might mean. People already have a collective experience of roses and what they connote—true love or prom or Valentine's Day. But a rose is a beautiful flower, and if you can learn how to paint it, why wouldn't you? They have these crazy folds and feel very fleshy. And maybe it's about making the most explicit version of my own work. About saying: "You want to call my work feminine? Fine, here's a fucking rose." There's a level of self-awareness in these choices—to practice something that's perceived as so fiercely marginal as still life watercolor painting—and I think the rose can encapsulate that.

For many years, I made paintings from what I think of as found images from domestic life. I'd take photographs of patterned glasses on my dish rack or a flash of light on my wood grain floor or other incidental moments around my apartment, and paint from those snapshots. I see this new work as a collection of interior landscapes or dream spaces. Instead of documenting microphenomena, I'm teasing out what's strange or surreal in interior spaces and restaging those settings, heightening the artificiality. Collecting is part of my process, usually through secondhand shopping. I look for objects that have a past life, have been touched or used or specially chosen, maybe even

handmade, not those that speak to a brand or mass cultural experience. The experience that one person has in relation to something they've seen every day can be magical and otherworldly.



Mamie Tinkler, *Feel Flows*, 2020, watercolor and gouache on paper mounted to board, 20 x 16".

Learning to use watercolor is learning to predict exactly how the medium will behave during the small window of time in which you can manipulate it. Once you put the brush to paper, the pigment starts to spread and separate and do strange things. I like that element of chance. I was always so frustrated with the historical burden of the painterly gesture. The surface of the artwork, mark-making, the density of the paint, the way the arm moved—all of those concerns felt too loaded in a gendered way. Watercolor managed to stay away from all of that and just deal with images. I used to be incredibly defensive about it because it seemed to be treated as a lesser medium, and sometimes not even considered painting. But I think I've made peace with it!

I recently underlined a quote in Lydia Davis's novel *The End of the Story*: "At times the truth seems to be enough, as long as I compress it and rearrange it a little." I'm much less of a minimalist than Davis, but that sentence rang very true for me. I share her obsession with making the smallest shift away from representing observed life, in order to make it that much stranger. No huge departures from reality, only tweaks. Even the more maximalist, psychedelic-seeming work in my show at Ulterior Gallery, like *Feel Flows*, 2020, is manipulated in only one way: The source photo has been duplicated bilaterally. Everything else is observed, from the wavy lighting gels that reflect a printed photo to a rope, a string of Christmas lights, or a weird orange fruit. It's about making the fewest possible moves away from the real. And if I want to make something that feels farther from reality, I just have to start with a stranger truth.

— As told to Jessica Baran