

APRIL 24, 2018

AUTHOR

Robert Russell: Moore. More. Moore.



Robert Russell, Moore More Moore, oil on canvas, 14×11 inches, 2018, and Barron, oil on canvas, 18×18 inches, 2018, Anat Ebgi. Photo Credit: Shana Nys Dambrot.

Robert Russell: *Moore. More. Moore.*

ANAT EBGI – AE2

THROUGH APRIL 28.

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

What do Andy Warhol, Kellyanne Conway, Charlie Brown, CalArts, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, softcore porn, firearms, Rembrandt, Marilyn Monroe, and Pikachu have in common? Funny you should ask, because painter Robert Russell has prepared an answer. It's you. "Moore. More. Moore." is a salon-style installation of discrete but

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intimately related oil on canvas and graphite on paper works. With a few exceptions, the proliferation of smaller pieces depict single figures or objects; the bigger they get, the more complex they become. From an array of moments, by the time one considers the two 6 x 5-foot keystone pieces in the anterior space, Russell has ramped up to a dense but ethereal speed of vertigo-inducing everything all at once. The largest works rather contain all the a la carte elements of the salon within themselves, so that the small pieces can be read as character studies and the large pieces as the novels; the playbills for the operas.

The greyscale tableaux “Guys That People Say Look Like Me” includes Jesus and Dave Grohl, arranged in the stacked-up, languid gradient fades of 70’s film posters. “San Fernando Valley” is a like a cosmological scroll the color of port wine cheese; an additive, symphonic progression of nesting images, historic and personal, nostalgic and naughty. Its dominant pink hue is also the chromatic tuning fork for all the work in the show, as in this composition, mitigated by strategic instances of bright yellow. This keeps the eye bouncing around between vignettes in an optical calisthenic that makes reading this codex possible, encouraging intuitive scanning and gradual clarity, offering a plurality of ways into the image field.

In the “salon” we encounter elegantly rendered and/or pop-art inflected depictions of what is not but easily could be, the deracinated pieces of the larger puzzles. Warhol tweaked in a turtleneck, Michelangelo’s David, baby-faced Hitler; wistful Barron Trump, Ivanka’s off-brand shoes, Rocky Balboa; a wriggling mosh pit of pink piglets, an impressive erection; Julianne Moore, Roger Moore, Roy Moore; and elements of old-school art historical still life like fish, lemons, and grapes. There’s more (no pun intended) but that’s the idea. Matchbooks, prescription pill bottles, red carpets. Though it’s kaleidoscopic and dense it presents a unified field largely because of the palette. The simultaneity in the room replicates the simultaneity in the mind and on the internet, as though making a tidy inventory of just one day’s worth of information overload.

To the extent that the work is about modern culture, Russell is wary of both the medium

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and the message. His overt, even heavy-handed critique of contemporary society (especially the scourges of opioids, rancid politics, social media, and toxic celebrity culture) is enacted with a cheeky verve, in which humor manifests in story and style, though the message be cynical and dire such as befits our troubled times. For instance, his deconstruction of Instagram glamour girl selfie culture flourishes in the modality of his facility for rendering classically idealized nudes. But the whole undertaking is also shot through with joy and romance, moments of love and poetry tucked inside the visual maelstrom's pockets of calm, lovers walking on a beach, parents and children holding hands, picnics. It's painted like a dream.

Yes, it's easy to get lost in an assessment of the narrative, of what they are pictures of, when in fact, all the action is in *how* they are made. Each painting is its own nesting universe, a palimpsestic salon unto itself, with Russell not only layering images but also styles. There are like half a dozen ways of handling paint in any of the larger works, and the small pieces are, from a technical perspective certainly, oil-based pigment perfection. What's interesting is that having demonstrated he can literally paint anything any way he wants, is his lavishing of skills on such banal topics — parallel economies of space, degrees of translucency, eras of reference, a knack for realism and chromatic mannerism. It is the combination of all this beauty, anxiety, and eccentricity that generates the true poetry of contradictions that contain multitudes.

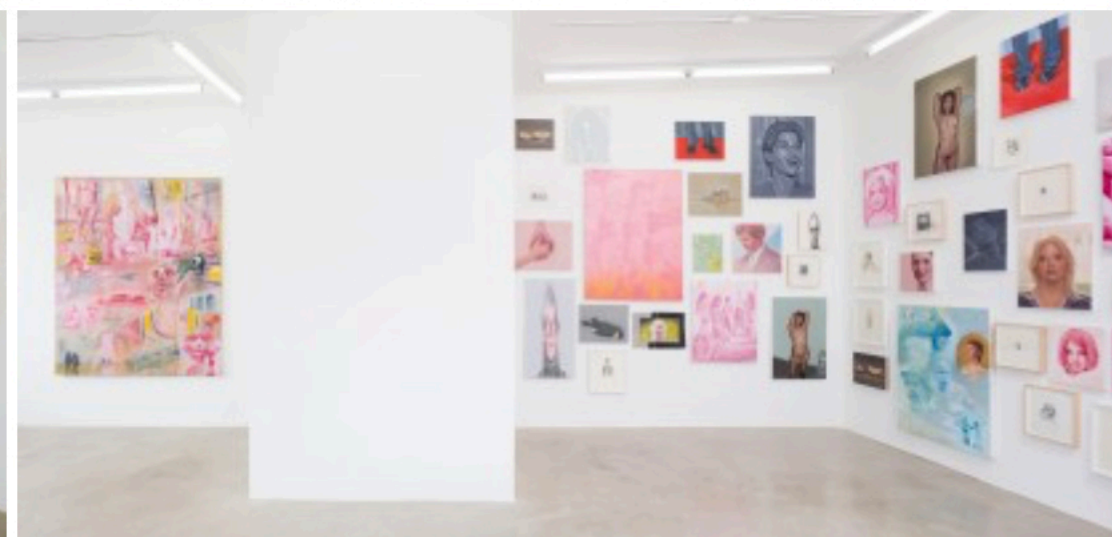
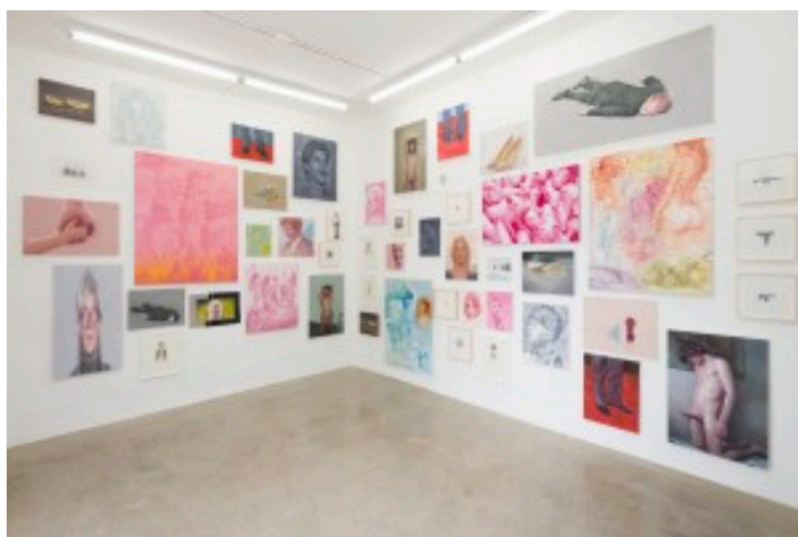
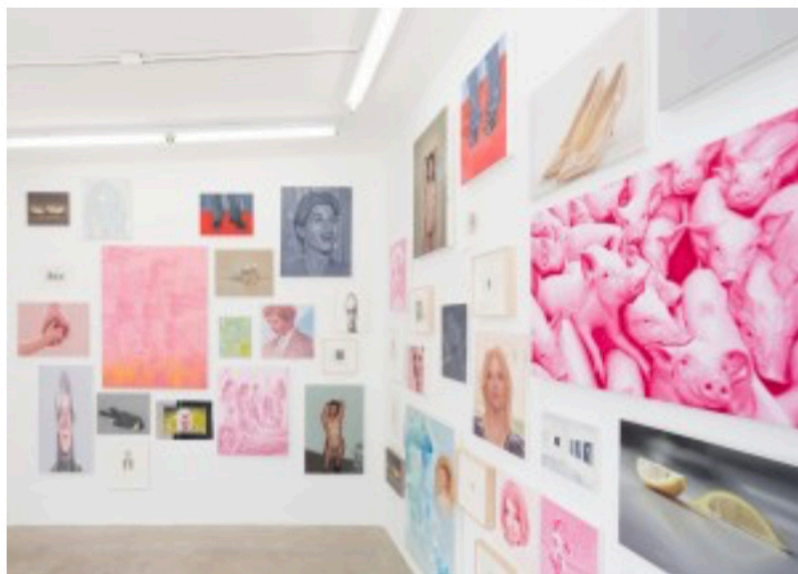
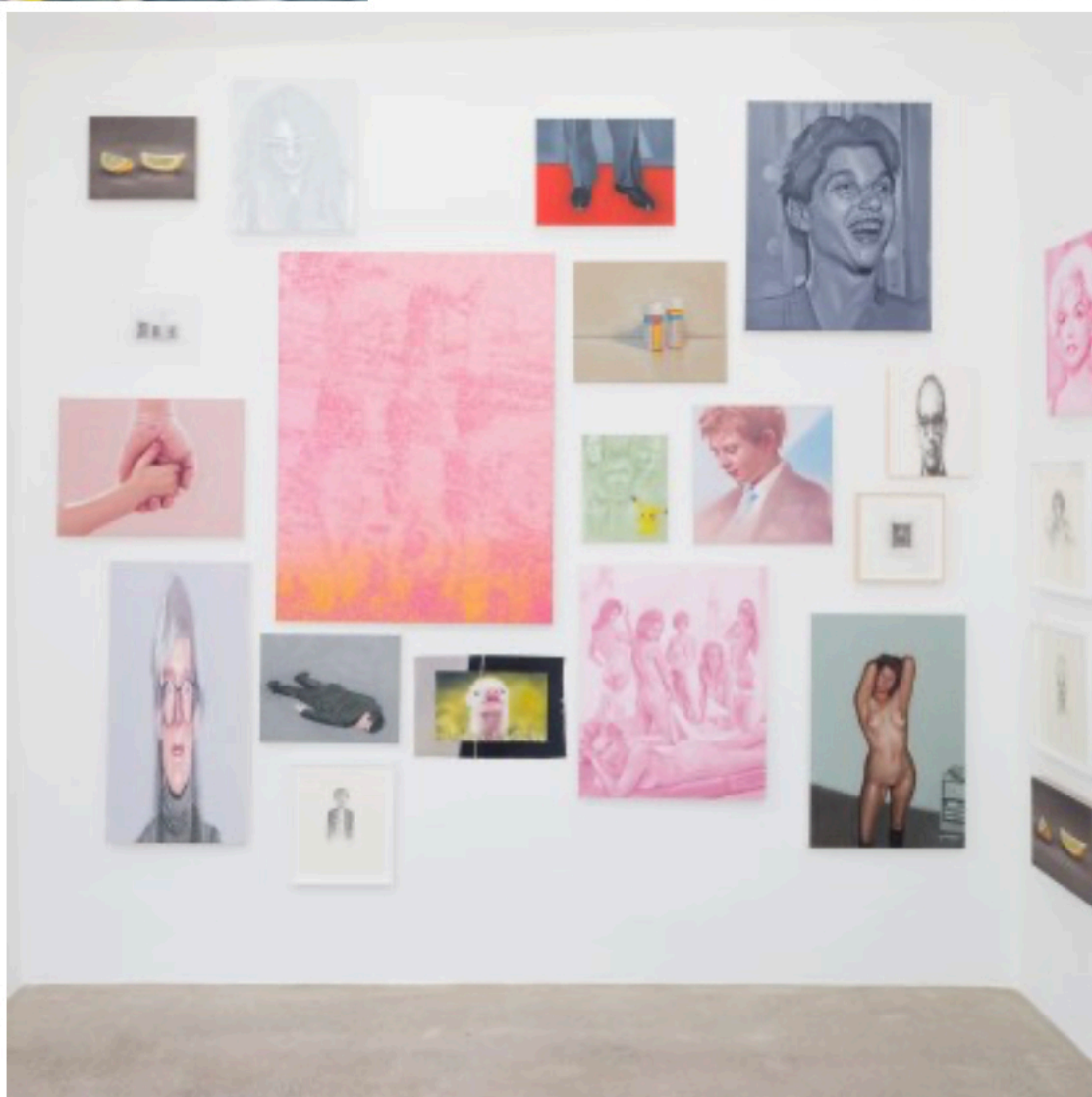
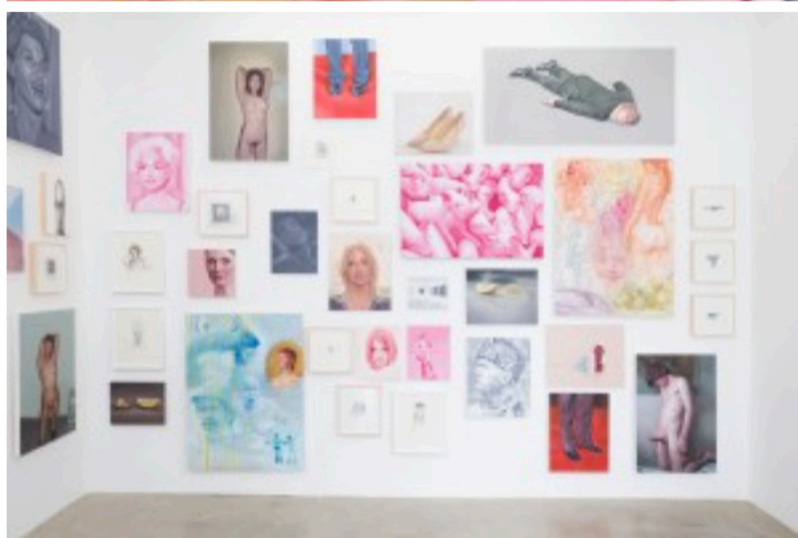
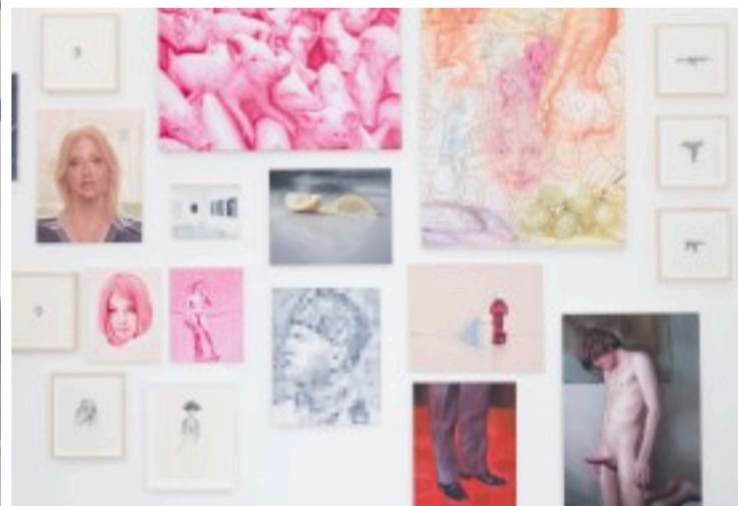
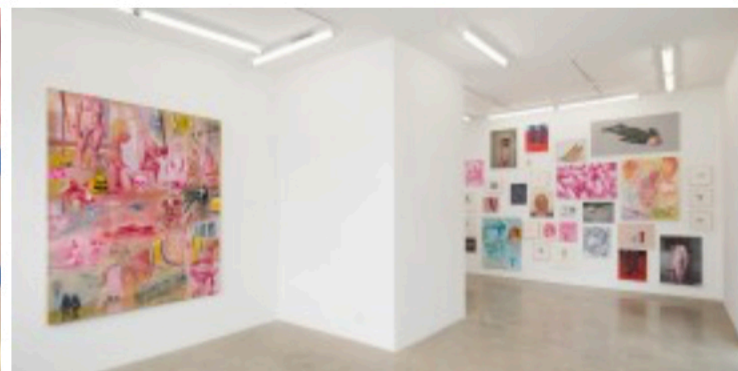
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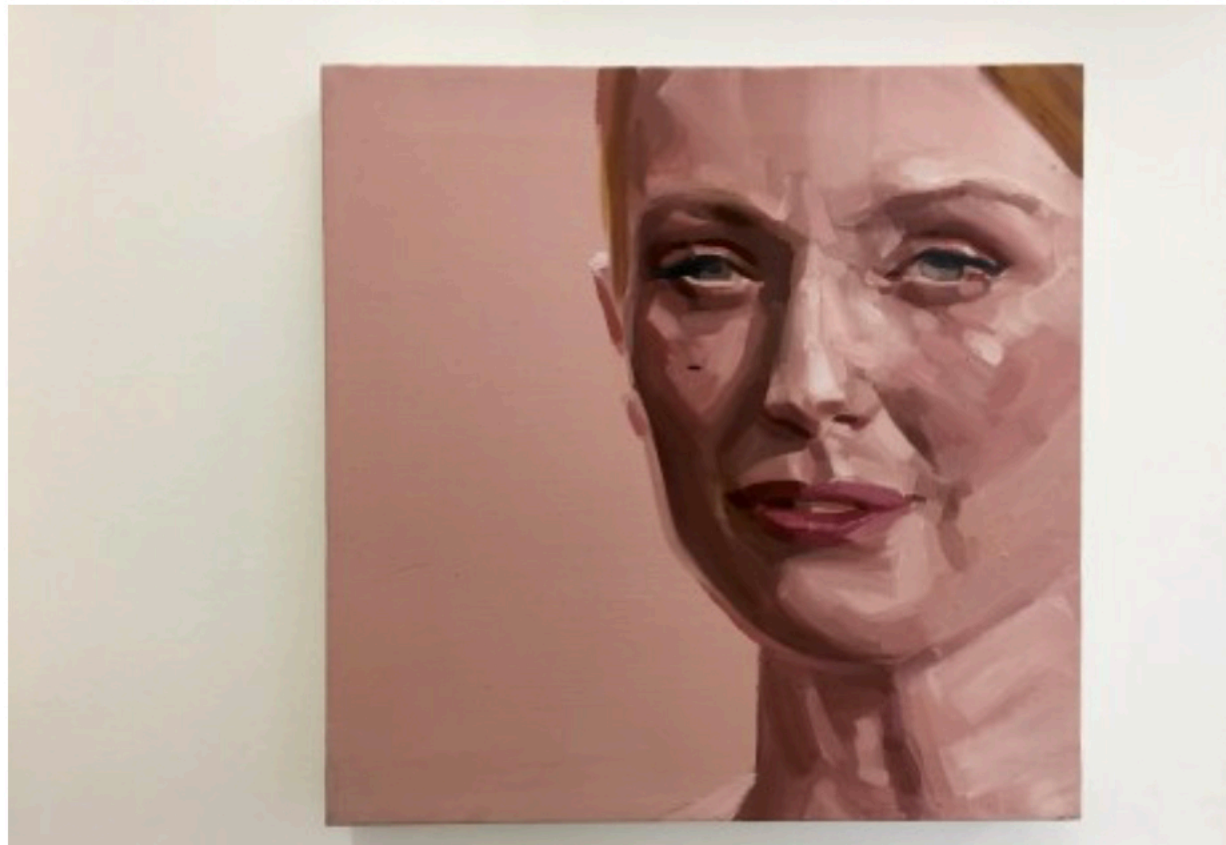
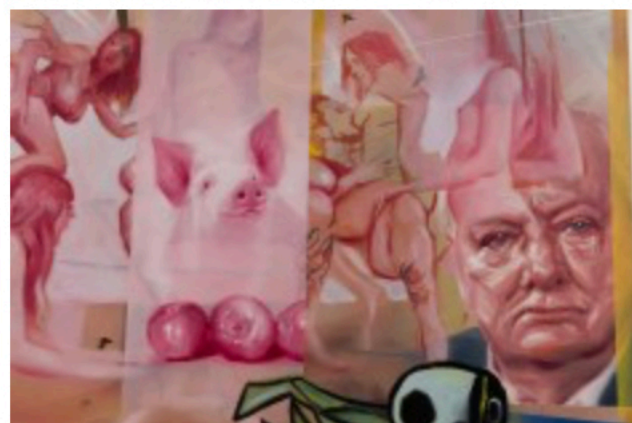
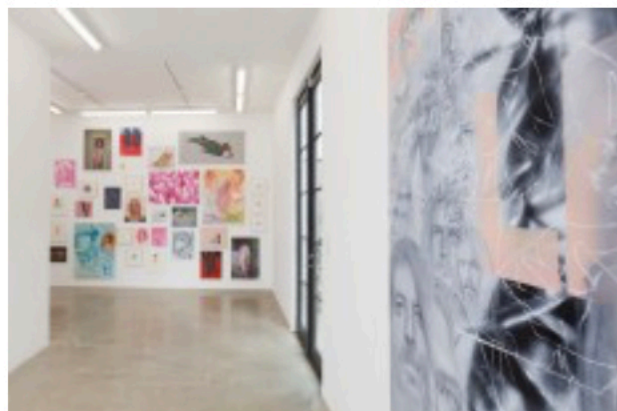
HOURS: WEDNESDAY – SATURDAY, 11AM – 5PM

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