

# Los Angeles Times

## Review: An alien beauty to Helen Rae's female subjects at the Good Luck Gallery By David Pagel

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The female figures in Helen Rae's 15 works on paper at the Good Luck Gallery in Los Angeles are unlike any the 76-year-old artist has drawn. Crisply silhouetted against solid white backdrops, clear blue skies and bright green machinery, they pop out from their surroundings like peacocks in a snowstorm.

Some strut. Others tower. Two pirouette. Several stand, hands on hips, like totems from other times and places.

Such independence usually means that the artist intends to endow her figures with dignity, autonomy and self-consciousness. That goal goes along with the notion that viewers will treat women better if we see pictures of them being treated respectfully.

Such monkey-see, monkey-do thinking could not be further from what Rae is up to in her colored-pencil drawings. Rather than shoring up a viewer's sense of self, her radically fractured compositions invite us to dip our toes into a world in which lampposts, potted plants and handbags are as fascinating as any human being, depicted or living.



Helen Rae's "January 27, 2016," (The Good Luck Gallery)

Rae makes every blade of grass — and every stitch of boldly patterned fabric — throb with life. The electrifying energy that pulses through her pictures gives form to a cosmos that is not anthropocentric.

Humanists might be terrified by this perspective. It flies in the face of everything egotists live for. But it's also thrilling.

In the 18th century, philosophers described the combination of excitement and terror as sublime. Today, that term has fallen out of fashion. But it captures the alien beauty of Rae's art.

Her drawings have their roots in fashion magazines. She tears out full-page spreads and uses a pencil to roughly sketch their contours on 24-by-18-inch sheets of paper. She then sets to work with colored pencils.

Rae draws like she means it. Using lots of elbow grease, she puts great pressure on the tips of her pencils. Her colors are saturated and dense. Her lines decisive. The scarcity of shading gives her images uncompromising intensity.

Her laser focus is vivid in the abundance of detail, particularly in the complex patterns of the fabrics she selects and edits, judiciously simplifying some elements and making others more complex, irregular, mind-blowing.

Rae flattens volumes, collapses space and fractures planes in ways that make Picasso's Cubism seem amateurish. Distorted torsos, misaligned limbs and mask-like facial features give her figures Sphinky mystery.

So convincing is her vision of things that after looking at four or five drawings you feel like an alien — out of place in a world that shares significant features with everyday reality but is charged with a kind of sizzling energy that is both exhausting and intoxicating.