

Feminism and Cuteness in Lily van der Stokker's Wall Paintings

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Dutch artist Lily van der Stokker has been making large-scale wall paintings that embrace cheerful, optimistic color and patterns since the late 1980's. Her recent exhibition, *The Tidy Kitchen*, has been greeting Hammer visitors since February with pastel pink, green and yellow playful bubble letters spelling out phrases like “tea-stains on the table cloth” and “pulling out hairs from the drain.” In a quick interview with the artist, we get to hear more about her intentions behind *The Tidy Kitchen*, her thoughts on feminism and cuteness, and why she thinks this is her most feminist work yet.

Make sure to see *The Tidy Kitchen* before it closes on June 3 at the Hammer Museum!



Hammer Projects: Lily van der Stokker

Laura Chow Reeve: How did you go about thinking of utilizing this specific space for your Hammer Project? What about the lobby wall opened up or limited possibilities for your work?

Lily van der Stokker: The work "Decent Tidy Kissy" from my all pink exhibition titled "Huh" at Koenig and Clinton's in NY inspired me to make a much bigger text piece and to take up the challenge of that word "decent". And as for the lobby wall, after having seen what previous lobby wall artist had done there, I decided quickly that a large text piece in happy colors would be good for both me and the Hammer.

LCR: What was the installation process like?

LvdS: I didn't install the work myself. I prepared everything in detail in Amsterdam and then my assistants Jan and Eva went to Los Angeles to install it. The piece has only four colors. Painters from the museum painted the background yellow and pink, and then Eva and Jan painted the texts on it in two weeks. My assistants and I have worked together for more than twenty years, so they know how to paint a sharp and flat image with many layers.

LCR: I'm interested in the ways this piece interrogates domesticity and gendered labor. Do you see *The Tidy Kitchen* as a celebration of that work?

LvdS: *The Tidy Kitchen* is a celebration of cleaning. I am very serious about it and I think it is maybe my most political and feminist artwork so far. As an emancipated woman I have had partners who always did the cooking more than I did and supported me a lot in my art making. I was happy to reverse that male/female role pattern. But then I enjoy cleaning my kitchen. I think cleaning is a relaxing activity.

If you look at statistics, emancipated women are still doing significantly more in the house than men. They still earn less for the same kind of work than men. And, it may be nature or nurture, I don't know, but women still relate more to textiles, the home, shopping to decorate the home, and the body. I think we have left behind the old-fashioned (male) bohemian artist's behavior. There are also artists who like to be organized and tidy. It's time to highlight these qualities.



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LCR: In a similar vein, how does *The Tidy Kitchen* engage emotion and its expression? I'm thinking of the text "Crying Crying for \$320 p day 8 hours a day," in particular.

LvdS: This one text piece "Crying, Crying" in the text fragments of *The Tidy Kitchen* wall painting, about all details of cleaning experience, is a bit of an off sentence. It says that women want to be paid for crying. Quite unusual, right? But women are usually good at that. I consider that to be a strength. Men should wish they could cry so easily.

The "Tidy Kitchen" artwork is certainly not meant as a lamentation about cleaning! It is a celebration of cleaning and doing house work. And we want to get paid for that too.

LCR: What do you see as the intersections between cuteness, happiness and feminism in your work?

LvdS: Little children are surrounded by bright, happy colors, but that's not considered smart. Women provide this happiness, but it has no economic value. Female cuteness and beautification of the body is not valued on an intellectual level, but we could not live without it. We consider optimistic bright colors, curls and fun pink to be shallow and dumb. However, they seem to create a relaxing pleasure. It has been my life's research to bring this beautiful strength into the forefront and to take away the negativity. My contribution to feminism is to remind people how beautiful women are when doing these things they are good at.