

SUSANNE KAMPS



Behind the screen

Paintings 2015 - 2019



.[The] photograph of the artist in her atelier standing in front of nine small oils... reads like one of her paintings: visually decadent, an immersive world of colours, scenes and perspectives woven together into a vision that is recognisable but constructed according to rules that are Kamps' alone.'

American art historian Prof Paula Burleigh, quoted from her essay on Susanne Kamps, in which she writes about the Young Masters Art Prize-winning painting Behind the Screen.

SCOPE NEW YORK 2020



Susanne Kamps, The Vintage Shop, oil on canvas

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'The painting interweaves itself like a tapestry. It searches expanses and transforms into expanses, condensing colours, strengthening and enhancing their autonomy.'

Prof Manfred Schneckenberger quoted in Susanne Kamps' catalogue Paintings 1996-2005.

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Time Present and Time Past: the uniting of temporal planes in the work of Susanne Kamps

by ANNA MCNAY

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.*

TS Eliot, Four Quartets



Paravent No. 3, 2004, Oil on canvas. Each panel 170 x 60 cm/67 x 24 in

An essay focusing on the four paintings submitted by Susanne Kamps for the tenth anniversary of the Young Masters Art Prize, established by the Cynthia Corbett Gallery in London, in particular Kamps' award-winning entry, *Behind the Screen*.

'Who would not, while looking at the painting of Susanne Kamps, think of Matisse, Dufy, Derain and the Fauves...?' asks Christiane Dressler in her 2010 essay on Susanne Kamps.¹ Certainly this is the case with the four works submitted to the tenth anniversary of Cynthia Corbett's Young Masters Art Prize last year, in particular the diptych *Behind the Screen* (2019), which specifically pays homage to Henri Matisse's *Interior with Aubergines* (1911). The vivid colour palette, the fronds of palms, the shuttered windows and tilted perspective all nod indisputably in the direction of the artist whom Kamps admits to having taken as her greatest inspiration since the year 2000.

library'.² For me, the artists who come to mind most when looking at her paintings are Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard, known for their style of 'intimism', or use of the domestic interior, along with the juxtaposition of pattern, planes of flat colour, and, again, the window motif. But there is also Kamps' use of the diptych, which compositionally opens up the concept of past and present, as much as the looking back to art history for inspiration does on an academic level.

Take the diptych *Comme Chez Nous* (2017), for example. The right-hand canvas depicts a domestic kitchen scene with an old-fashioned stove,



Behind the Screen, 2019, Oil on canvas, Diptych, 80 x 200 cm/32 x 79 in

However, it would be far too facile to look only to him, as Kamps' knowledge of and sampling from art history goes much further, taking in not only specific artists, but also movements, motifs and devices – all of which she subjects to her own interpretation, rendering the finished works, as she terms them, 'homages', very much imbued with her own added flavour. Kamps neither copies nor steals (to reference the widely-attributed Picasso quote that 'good artists copy, but great artists steal'): she absorbs, amalgamates and reinterprets, using the art of past masters much as she uses her collection of photographs, bric-à-brac from her beloved flea markets, and domestic objects – as, in the words of Matisse, a 'working

colander, sieve, pepper grinder, bulb of garlic... The two canvases both do and don't join seamlessly – the white-clothed table that fills the majority of the left-hand canvas runs over on to the right-hand one, as does the flowering oleander plant standing in front of it. But the upper section seems dissonant – the two sets of Matissean cut-out leaves abut abruptly. It is unclear whether they are intended to be pictures on the wall or windows – knowing the answer is not, of course, a prerequisite – but this slight jarring of the viewer's reading across the work makes clear that there are two distinct planes at play. Whether these are planes of space, of time, of imagination and memory... Again, anything is possible.

A similar effect is evoked in Kamps' earlier painting *Chambre Bizarre* (2008), which comprises a peculiar diptych-esque division, with the left-hand canvas making up two thirds of the composition and depicting an interior with a table, and, in the background, a window opening out on to a scene with a bridge and palm trees, plus what could be a seaside promenade, with the blue-patterned wallpaper curling in from this secondary image, as if it were the lapping waves splashing into the room.



Comme Chez Nous, 2017, Oil on canvas, Diptych, 100 x 280 cm/40 x 110 in

The right-hand third, almost entirely unrelated, depicts a display of lilies – quite Japanese in its decorativeness. One wonders whether the ‘bizarre’ of the title refers to the room itself or to this anomalous division of space and introduction of a new, non-linear plane.



Chambre Bizarre, 2008, Oil on canvas, 100 x 140 cm/39 x 55 in

Japonisme – and the ukiyo-e printmakers of Edo period Japan – is a style which has influenced Kamps both directly, but also through the artists she draws from most readily. A phenomenon which reached the peak of its influence in the west around 1890, it readily employed the polyptych form, as well as the use of black in its woodcut technique – another aspect reflected in *Comme Chez Nous* (and seen in Matisse's work, in, for example, *Still Life with Pomegranates*, 1947).³

The table in *Comme Chez Nous*, based on Henri Fantin-Latour's *Still Life Corner of a Table* (1873), comprises a random assortment of items, as Belinda Thomson writes of Vuillard's *The Candlestick* (c1900): ‘[a] seemingly haphazard conjunction of disparate objects – a far cry from the selective monumentality of the still lifes of Paul Cézanne...⁴ Whereas Fantin-Latour was best known for his flower paintings, Vuillard's art was ‘a celebration of the mundane’, ‘succinct intimacy’.⁵ Unlike the claustrophobia often felt in his heavily patterned and dark interiors, however, the tone and feeling of Kamps' works is the exact opposite. Even *Comme Chez Nous*, with its dark background, is, perhaps due to the foregrounded white and turquoise, bright, light-filled, airy, and has, as the title suggests, a sense of homeliness.

Nevertheless, there is a certain tension. The stove depicts the one in Kamps' atelier and, albeit unbeknownst to the viewer, adds a twinge, relating

to her not knowing, from day to day, whether or not it will fire. More overtly, the leaping cat not only adds movement but causes a sharp intake of breath on the part of the viewer. The picture captures a precise moment in time – the very instant of the present, now already past, but immortalised forever in the window of the canvas – and one is bound to wonder: what will (or did) happen? Will (or did) the cat bring the tablecloth crashing down, smashing the decanter, glass, fruit bowl, dish and other tableware?

Cats are hugely significant, not just in Kamps' work, but also in her life. ‘I am indeed a cat person,’ she admits. ‘We have two lovely cats, Seraphine (tricolour) and Carry (a very modern cat, and she is very smart as well – she manages to open the fridge by herself). Of course, they are the coolest cats in the world.’⁶ These cats appear frequently in Kamps' works, as, indeed, they do – albeit often camouflaged – in Bonnard's *Cat Days* (2017) – a homage to David Hockney and his *Dog Days*, a book of paintings and drawings celebrating the companionship of his dachshunds Stanley and Boogie – is, similarly, entirely de-

icated to Kamps' domestic companions. The repetition of the cats across the two canvases came about purely because Kamps felt that Seraphine was so big she had to paint her more than once – sometimes her compositional decisions really can be this seemingly arbitrary. The large 1930s vases with monkeys on them, for example, were eBay purchases – ‘I saw them and knew I had to have them!’ – in themselves not too frightfully expensive, but, once shipping from the UK was added on, ‘they ended up being the most expensive vases ever!’ Accordingly, Kamps felt she at least had to immortalise them in a painting.

As Chris Stephens describes the components in the paintings of Vuillard, so are those in *Cat Days* ‘representational but design-oriented’.⁷ To let Vuillard speak for himself: ‘One lives surrounded by decorated objects. In the most ordinary interior, there's not an object the form of which doesn't have an ornamental pretension – and most of the time the form hides its function from us under these irrelevant embellishments’.⁸ Certainly, *Cat Days* epitomises what Thomson describes as Vuillard's ‘modest objects and dense patterns’.⁹ She



Cat Days, 2017, Oil on canvas, Diptych, 160 x 280 cm/63 x 110 in

goes on to describe how the French artist, with his cleverly chosen assemblage of patches of flat colour and pattern, remained true to the artist and writer Maurice Denis' dictum, from his *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* (1890), whereby the 'flat surface [is] covered with colours arranged in a certain order' but tells a homely narrative too.¹⁰ The same holds true of Kamps' paintings, just as she also has a habit of seemingly throwing together a composition of objects, patterns and colours she loves, 'in defiance of would-be objective rules of taste,'¹¹ nevertheless creating runaway poetic successes, as only an artist blessed with good taste might.

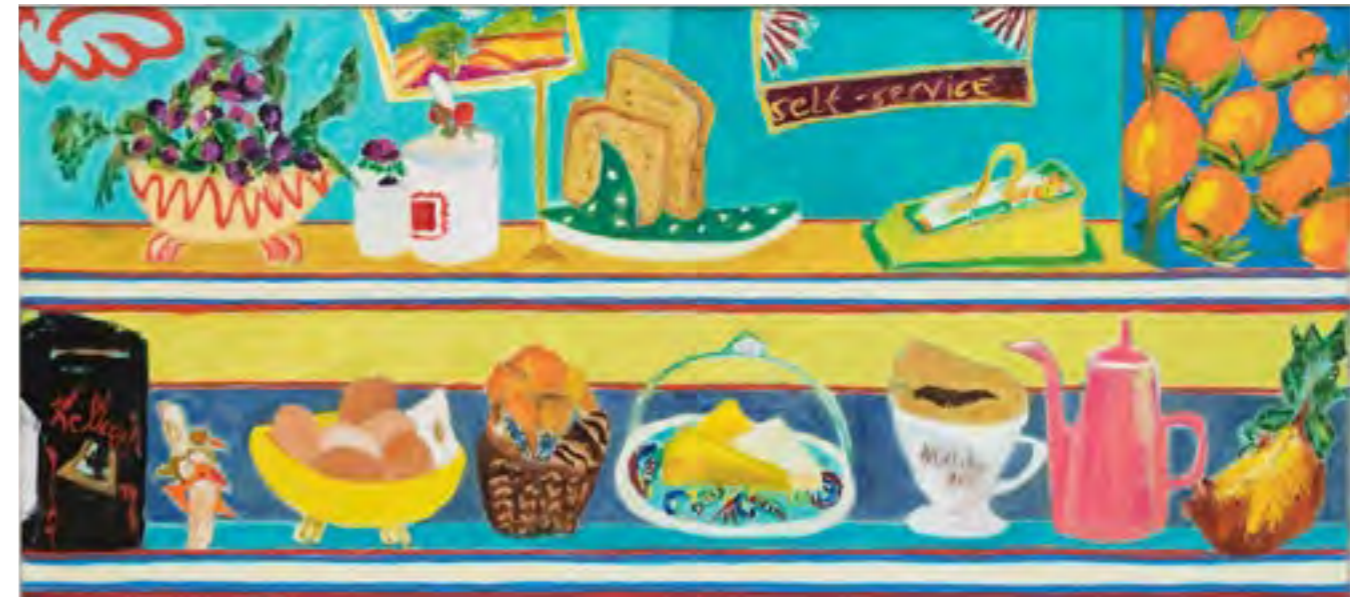
Kamps' colours are intense and vibrant – like those of Matisse and the Fauves. She often mixes fresh pigment into the wet paint on the canvas, in order to achieve the greatest degree of colour

saturation possible. Bonnard, too, adopted this brilliant palette following his visit to Saint-Tropez in 1909, when he was awed by the Mediterranean colours, 'the sea, the yellow walls, the shadows as coloured as the light'.¹² Years later, his works – take, for example, *The Gulf of Saint-Tropez* (c1937) and *The Studio with Mimosa* (1939-46) – were still recalling these impressions. It was also in the Midi that 'he was struck by the ways in which the strong light affected his perception of the inherent colour of objects, their shadows and their reflections'.¹³ Such an awareness can also be seen in Kamps' works, in particular on the patterned, intimist wallpaper of *Smokey Earl Grey* (2017), a painting included in the brochure produced for the Young Masters Art Prize.¹⁴

The fourth work submitted to the prize, *Food Counter* (2019), in turn, is a homage to Wayne



Smokey Earl Grey, 2017, Oil on canvas, 180 x 270 cm/70 x 88 in



Food Counter, 2019, Oil on canvas, 80 x 180 cm/32 x 71 in

Thiebaud, another artist whom Kamps frequently references (for example, see also *Pâtisserie*, 2004; the six-piece commission *Zucotto* (now in a German corporate collection), 2005; and *Macarons*, 2019) and whose colours and subjects she loves. Unlike the other three works in this set, this painting is not a diptych in the traditional sense, nevertheless it is bisected horizontally into the two shelves of the restaurant counter. It is almost like watching a conveyor belt spool past, laden with motifs from Kamps' visual vocabulary, or 'working library' – the objects breathe a sense of familiarity, both from our own lives and homes, but also from her other works. Like words in a sentence, the visual lexemes interact and combine to form new meanings in each work. As Matisse advised his students, a still life should capture the 'emotion of the ensemble, the interrelation of the objects, the specific character of each object – modified by its relation to the others'.¹⁵ No object should ever be considered in isolation.

The edible items in this image outdo even Thiebaud in the luminescence of their pink, turquoise and yellow palette. Far too saccharine to be edible, they seem more like sugar confectionaries made solely for display, which, of course, these paintings also are – temptations, causing the



Pâtisserie, 2004, Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm/39 x 47 in

viewer to desire some sweet delicacy to savour, but, in themselves, inedible. Bonnard once confessed: 'Certainly colour had carried me away. I sacrificed form to it almost unconsciously.'¹⁶ Kamps, however, doesn't allow this happen. As her former tutor, Hermann-Josef Kuhna, notes in his 2005 essay: for Kamps, form establishes the pictorial space and colour elevates it.¹⁷

Let us now come back to where we began and look a little more closely at *Behind the Screen*.

The title derives from the folding object that fills most of the left-hand canvas, a painting of an actual screen Kamps made – *Paravent No. 3* – in 2004. This is where the homage to Matisse most blatantly resides, but it might be noted, also, that two of Bonnard’s earliest works influence by Japonisme include the four-panel, lithographic-print screen, *The Nurses’ Promenade* (1894-97), and another screen, *Women in the Garden* (1890-91).

The right-hand canvas, created first, was painted during a stay in Paris and liberally depicts Kamps’ apartment during this time. I say ‘liberally’, for the palette is imbued with a southern glow; the sofa is that from her home in Düsseldorf; and the cats Seraphine and Carry, whom she was understandably missing, have been brought to play (or rather snooze) in their favourite comfy corner.

Here, too, the two canvases, at first glance, line up, but look more closely and there is a certain mismatch between the floorboards – and then you notice the shadow figure, creeping from right to left. Described in the Young Master brochure as having been added ‘on a whim’, Kamps confirms that this really was the case. The painting is otherwise very homely and welcoming, but the figure casts – quite literally – an uncanny shadow over it. There is something about her being in the centre, just into the left-hand canvas, thereby perhaps representative of the past – that which has gone and is no longer? Look more closely at Bonnard’s seemingly joyful *The Studio with Mimosa* and you will see a shadow figure there too, in the bottom left-hand corner. In this case, it is most likely the memory of his wife Marthe, who died in 1942, four years before he completed the painting.

Who, then, is the figure in Kamps’ work? Is it her own shadow, longing for the seaside and summery joy of the image on the screen? Since Kamps often paints scenes depicting the studio, or with an easel, the implication is that the reflection of any character on the canvas should be the artist herself. Although, equally, it could be that of the viewer. Either way, there is something unsettling about her, causing us to enquire and dig deep into our own thoughts and psychologies, our own me-



Behind the Screen, Right Panel, 80 x 100 cm/31 x 39 in

mories and our own desires. The left-hand panel appears to depict summer in the south of France; the right-hand one, from the flowers – tulips and hydrangea, which are starting to drop their petals (another hint at the implicit memento mori, the transience and passing of time), seems to be late spring in Paris. The shadow figure plays a role here in bridging the two spaces – two places, two seasons, two memories, two times.

With reference to this notion of the relationship between the polyptych and the representation of different times, Kamps’ *Hafen Cassis* (2000) is exemplary. This time a triptych, it maps neatly on to past, present and future, with the calm harbour (past) to the left, the restaurant to the right (future), and the larger, central image depicting a cat setting upon the freshly caught fish (present), introducing a tension – as with the leaping cat in



Behind the Screen, Left Panel, 80 x 100 cm/31 x 39 in

Comme Chez Nous – as to what will happen next and whether the catch will make it to the restaurant before being gobbled up by the greedy feline.

The previously-mentioned motif of the window is another device Kamps uses, alongside the different panels of her diptychs, and the collision of planes of flat colour and patterned surface, to suggest different temporalities. This is nowhere more apparent than in *Behind the Screen*, with its three full-length windows in the Parisian apartment, and a window within a window (and a screen within a screen) on the left-hand side.

In *A Theory of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Richard Andrews describes the window thus: ‘This apparently simple building device [...] defines the borderland or the frame between the interior and the exterior. Such abstraction enables us to think of the implications of that distinction: interiority/

what is “other” or outside; what is familiar on the one hand, and what is less familiar on the other. [...] The window itself is a membrane, a plane of transparency between the two worlds...¹⁸ Relating it specifically to the temporal, Lara Marlowe writes of Bonnard: ‘[He] used windows, doors and mirrors as composition devices. But they are also metaphysical, creating a constant flow between reality and reflection, between interior and exterior, the painter’s inner life and the world outside. [...] Time is suspended.¹⁹

And Matisse himself wrote: ‘If I have managed to reunite in my painting what is outside, that is to say the sea, with the inside, it is because the atmosphere of the landscape and my room are one and the same... I don’t have to bring the outside and the inside together, the two are reunited in my emotion.²⁰



Hafen Cassis, 2000, Oil on canvas, 180 x 230 cm/71 x 91 in

I believe the same is true for Kamps. Through the use of her various devices – the diptych, the different planes, the window motif, the captured moment of tension, the shadow figure – she brings together not just past and present, but also present and future.

Perhaps, then, it is not so much as Eliot opens his *Four Quartets*, but as he closes it:

***Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.***

It is the present which holds both time past and time future, and the present moment which is always captured in Kamps' painting – the artist's present moment, even if imbued with strains of past and future (and even conditional 'what if's), but also the viewers', affected, in whichever way it is, by their encounter with the work. The work, in this instance, is the only window: the window through which viewers looks on to the world, imaginary as it may be, in which they, for as long as they stand before the painting, exist.

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FUSSNOTEN

¹ Christiane Dressler, "25 Degrees in Winter," in *Susanne Kamps. 25 Degrés en Hiver. Bilder 2005-2010*, 2010, pp4-5, p4.

² Matisse described his collection of objects – and objets d'art – from around the world as his 'working library' to his daughter Marguerite Duthuit in 1943. Archives Henri Matisse, Issy-les-Moulineaux, cited in Ellen McBreen, "Matisse at Work", in *Matisse in the Studio*, published by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 2017, pp13-42, p14.

³ Other works by Kamps that pay homage to the style of Japonisme include (not exhaustively): *Bambus Triptychon* (1998), *Japanese Breakfast* (2006), *Japanese Lady Playing the Samisen* (2006), *Asia* (2009), *Veilleur de Nuit* (2009) and *After Van Gogh* (2015).

⁴ Belinda Thomson, "Vuillard's Poetry of the Everyday: Questions of Intimism and Taste," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp9-27, p25.

⁵ Chris Stephens, "Foreword," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp5-7, p6

⁶ Personal correspondence.

⁷ Chris Stephens, "Foreword," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp5-7, p5.

⁸ Note by Vuillard, 26 October 1894, cited in Belinda Thomson, "Vuillard's Poetry of the Everyday: Questions of Intimism and Taste," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp9-27, p10.

⁹ Belinda Thomson, "Vuillard's Poetry of the Everyday: Questions of Intimism and Taste," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp9-27, p26.

¹⁰ Belinda Thomson, "Vuillard's Poetry of the Everyday: Questions of Intimism and Taste," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp9-27, pp17-18.

¹¹ Belinda Thomson, "Vuillard's Poetry of the Everyday: Questions of Intimism and Taste," in *Edouard Vuillard: The Poetry of the Everyday*, published by The Holburne Museum, Bath, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 24 May – 15 September 2019, pp9-27, p27.

¹² Lara Marlowe, "Pierre Bonnard: The bright palette of a tortured soul," *The Irish Times*, 23 April 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/pierre-bonnard-the-bright-palette-of-a-tortured-soul-1.3858758> [accessed 13 May 2020].

¹³ Matthew Gale, "Pierre Bonnard: Suspended in Mid-Air," in *The CC Land Exhibition. Pierre Bonnard: The Colour of Memory* published by Tate Publishing, London, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 2019, pp10-24, p11.

¹⁴ *Susanne Kamps: Tea Time*, Cynthia Corbett Gallery, March 2020

¹⁵ "Sarah Stein's Notes, 1908," in Jack Flam, *Matisse on Art*, rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p51, cited in Ellen McBreen, "Matisse at Work", in *Matisse in the Studio*, published by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 2017, pp13-42, p18.

¹⁶ Charles Terrasse, *Bonnard, 1927*, pp128-29: 'Certes, la couleur m'avait entraîné. Je lui sacrifiais, et presque inconsciemment, la forme...'. cited in Matthew Gale, "Pierre Bonnard: Suspended in Mid-Air," in *The CC Land Exhibition. Pierre Bonnard: The Colour of Memory* published by Tate Publishing, London, to accompany the exhibition of the same name, 2019, pp10-24, p12.

¹⁷ Hermann-Josef Kuhna, "Starke Farben", in *Susanne Kamps. Bilder 1996-2005*, 2005, pp8-9, p8.

¹⁸ Richard Andrews, *A Theory of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Routledge: New York, 2014, pp91-92.

¹⁹ Lara Marlowe, "Pierre Bonnard: The bright palette of a tortured soul," *The Irish Times*, 23 April 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/pierre-bonnard-the-bright-palette-of-a-tortured-soul-1.3858758> [accessed 13 May 2020].

²⁰ Matisse in a letter to Teriadeune, cited in Richard Andrews, *A Theory of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Routledge: New York, 2014, pp91-92, p93.

Seductive Subversion: Susanne Kamps' Interior Views

by Prof. PAULA BURLEIGH, PhD

An American art historian explores the role of gender in Susanne Kamps' painting – and the concept of “Camp.”

The work of Susanne Kamps is unabashedly maximalist: boldly colored, kaleidoscopic configurations of texture and pattern transform everyday interiors into intriguing spatial puzzles. The artist has described her work as a “tapestry of textures,” which aptly characterizes her predilection for sumptuous surface designs, particularly of textiles. Critics and historians have noted Kamps' fidelity to the flattened perspectives and saturated palette of Henri Matisse and the Fauves, the early 20th century French experimentalists with color. But other more recent historical precedents are just as relevant: Kamps is in dialogue with Wayne Thiebaud's joyful cake and pie paintings, and her hallucinatory palette and dizzying array of perspectives pay homage to the work of David Hockney. In subject matter, Kamps gravitates towards variations of the still life, delighting in ordinary views of furniture, drinking vessels, food, and table tops. She taps into a venerable tradition of artists—Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso—who took the greatest formal risks with the most quotidian objects. Indeed, while Kamps' paintings are legible as lush interiors, they also periodically dissolve into pure passages of color and form, often revealing multiple perspectives knit together into a single composition. But in addition to myriad art historical references, Kamps' practice displays a contemporary sensibility that is all her own. In this essay, I explore the ways in which Kamps works within various historical legacies

in order to update and even subvert them through her engagement with themes of gender, Camp, and ritual.

The large-scale, panoramic composition *Behind the Screen* (2019) encapsulates key themes that recur throughout the artist's oeuvre. On one side of the diptych, the light-filled living room of Kamps' Paris apartment opens onto tantalizing fragments of cerulean blue skies. The opposite panel displays a floor-to-ceiling, painted folding screen. Familiar still life elements—flowers, vases, books—populate the living room, alongside more vernacular decorative objects, including a large flamingo figurine and the letter e mounted on the wall. Two cats—Seraphine and Carry—sleep peacefully on an eggshell colored couch. While the painterly brushwork and jewel-toned palette echo early twentieth century Fauvist aesthetics, anecdotal details—the flamingo and neighboring cockatoo, the mounted letter, the decidedly contemporary sofa—anchor the space in a recognizably current moment. Such design flourishes provocatively engage questions of taste and kitsch, boundaries the artist pushes even further with the painted screen. In the history of Western art, critics often relegated painted screens to the marginal arena of design, a category subservient to painting and sculpture. Rejecting these artificial hierarchies, Kamps embraces the domestic sphere and its attendant bric-à-brac.



Behind the Screen, 2019, Oil on canvas, Diptych, 80 x 200 cm/32 x 79 in

Indeed, much of her work explores the private spaces that individuals curate for their own solace and joy.

Kamps' interest in design and domestic interiors raises questions concerning the largely unremarked upon role of gender in her work. Kamps' art historical sampling comes entirely from men, a reality dictated by the systemic inequalities which made education and exhibition opportunities far less available to women. Kamps borrows select aesthetic sensibilities of her male artist forebears, but then suffuses the resulting compositions with content that questions conventional gender norms. Her focus on the domestic interior is far from neutral, but the exploration of a space historically coded as feminine. The painting *Belle Epoque* (2015) brings the viewer into intimate proximity with a mirror atop a vanity, sitting next to jewelry and perfume bottles. Where we should see ourselves in the mirror, there is only a disembodied hand-shaped ring stand, floating on a sinuously patterned textile in front of bracelets on a rack. Regardless of the viewer's gender, *Belle Epoque* puts the audience in the position of performing feminine self-presentation, engaging in a ritual of adornment. Elsewhere, as in *Fortnum & Mason* (2017) and *Vintage Shop* (2018), the viewer becomes a shopper, admiring window displays of hats, shoes, women's bags, or an elaborate tea setting bedecked with impeccably decorated



Belle Epoque, 2015, Watercolour on paper, 100 x 70 cm/39 x 28 in

sweets. These are stylish worlds, distinctly feminine and occasionally bordering on the concept of



Vintage Shop, 2018, Oil on canvas, 120 x 160 cm/47 x 63 in

Camp. Notoriously difficult to define, Camp is an aesthetic sensibility that unapologetically revels in style, fun, and excess, dwelling somewhere between so-called good and bad taste. Ultimately, Camp questions the very existence of categories like “good” and “bad.” The American writer Susan Sontag wrote what remains the most well-known essay on Camp in 1964. There, in “Notes on Camp,” Sontag defines Camp as “a mode of seduction,” which she goes on to describe as “[a] spirit of extravagance. Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers.”

Kamps does not show us that woman: the viewer becomes that woman, navigating her fabulous environs. Even the great champions of the still life such, from Chardin to Picasso, would not have included some of the objects Kamps routinely depicts—to do so would have been to veer into

feminine territory, historically regarded as frivolous. But Camp (and Kamps) rejects outmoded gender-based hierarchies. Instead, she lavishes attention on wallpaper, window shop displays, and textiles. In this way, Kamps explores themes of design, consumption, and fashion to radically update—even upend—the masculine legacy of the French avant-garde painters.

But this is not the whole story: returning to Behind the Screen, we can discern influences beyond the French avant-garde. While the folding screen was often dismissed as an insubstantial design object in the Western tradition, it occupies a central position in the history of Japanese art, an important source of inspiration for Kamps. The flat, graphic quality of her painting reflects aesthetic conventions common to Japanese prints of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—shal-

low space, clearly outlined forms, and the absence of shadows—formal devices that likewise inspired many European artists. Perhaps Kamps’ assimilation of various cultural influences ex-

further away than the shallow space should allow. A mischievous sprite peers out at the viewer from behind an ambiguously situated plant, inviting us to parse this visual puzzle. Notably, four cats are



Fortnum & Mason, 2017, Oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in

plains why she has never been beholden to staid Western conventions of single-point perspective or illusionistic space. A large interior titled Cat Days (2017) illustrates not only the artist’s experimentation with space and perspective, but time. While the composition is legible as a kitchen inhabited by lounging felines, under scrutiny, the space breaks down into a Cubist juxtaposition of disparate perspectives. The implied viewer is in motion, and the composition revolves around its own mysterious inner logic. Unmoored, the viewer floats above checkered floor tiles that would collide discordantly were they not covered with a long blue table. A wooden stool appears much

visible but in only two patterns, suggesting that the scene unfolds over time. While the multiple perspectives nod to Cézanne and Picasso, the bold outlines and continuous narrative are more in line with a Japanese tradition—perhaps subtly referenced in the patterned vases (a recent Ebay purchase by the artist), which look like Japanese lacquerware.

The Japanese influence extends beyond space and time. Japanese folding screens, like the one featured in Behind the Screen, served as backdrops for rituals, from the tea ceremony to dance performances. While the human figure appears sparing-

ly in Kamps' work, there is ample evidence of the body's movements, actions, and desires. In the form of macarons, tarts, and cakes, promises of gustatory delights abound. Elaborately appointed tabletops and tea sets suggest that the artist is less interested in the food itself than the ceremony of its consumption. Indeed, while painting inherently lends itself to sight, the content gestures toward multi-sensory experience of other kinds: the pleasures of eating and drinking, the aroma of perfume, even sound in the form of sheet music. Kamps' compositions celebrate excess: they are colorful mélanges that pay homage to the joys of

Van Gogh's sunflowers on the wall (in actuality, the image existed on the cover of a purchased exhibition catalogue). She rendered the sighting of an actual peacock in Holland Park as a splendid painted bird flanking a doorway, reminiscent of a motif from Whistler's Peacock Room (1877). The viewer can make out only the blank backs of several frames stacked against the wall, suggesting additional memories, experiences, and influences, all waiting to be translated into visual ciphers. Returning to Behind the Screen one last time, Kamps' folding screen is more than a design object and a mainstay of Japanese art history; it is



Cat Days, 2017, Oil on canvas, 160 x 280 cm/63 x 110 in

sensorial experience, the best of life's fleeting, time-bound pleasures. It is no surprise that cats—the most decadent domestics—are among the few living creatures that inhabit the paintings.

Above all, Kamps' work is an idiosyncratic visual language that moves seamlessly between lived experience and a graphic world of color and line. In Notting Hill (2010), a painting based on the London flat that the artist shares with her husband, Kamps represented a visit to a Van Gogh exhibition at the British Museum with a poster of

also a painting within a painting, quoting an actual folding screen—Paravan No. 3 (2004)—that Kamps painted in the style of Matisse. It is easy to get lost in this intricate labyrinth that traverses nimbly between the real object and the flat composition, between the past and the present. It is a pleasurable, albeit dizzying journey.

A photograph of the artist in her atelier standing in front nine small oils arranged in a tight grid emphasizes the way in which the paintings participate in an ongoing conversation. Indeed, Kamps



Notting Hill, 2010, Oil on canvas, 180 x 220 cm/71 x 87 in

considers this collection a single work depicting nine views of Paris, and she has made other similarly configured works – nine views of Japan, nine views of Ghana – that function almost like installations. Chalk full of references, the photograph reads like one of her paintings: visually decadent, an immersive world of colors, scenes, and perspectives, woven together into a vision that is recognizable but constructed according to rules that are Kamps' alone.

Paula Burleigh, PhD
Meadville, Pennsylvania USA
August 2020



Paravent No. 3, 2004, Oil on canvas.
 Each panel 170 x 60 cm/67 x 24 in

Oil paintings





Paris Themes, 2019
Oil on canvas
each 70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



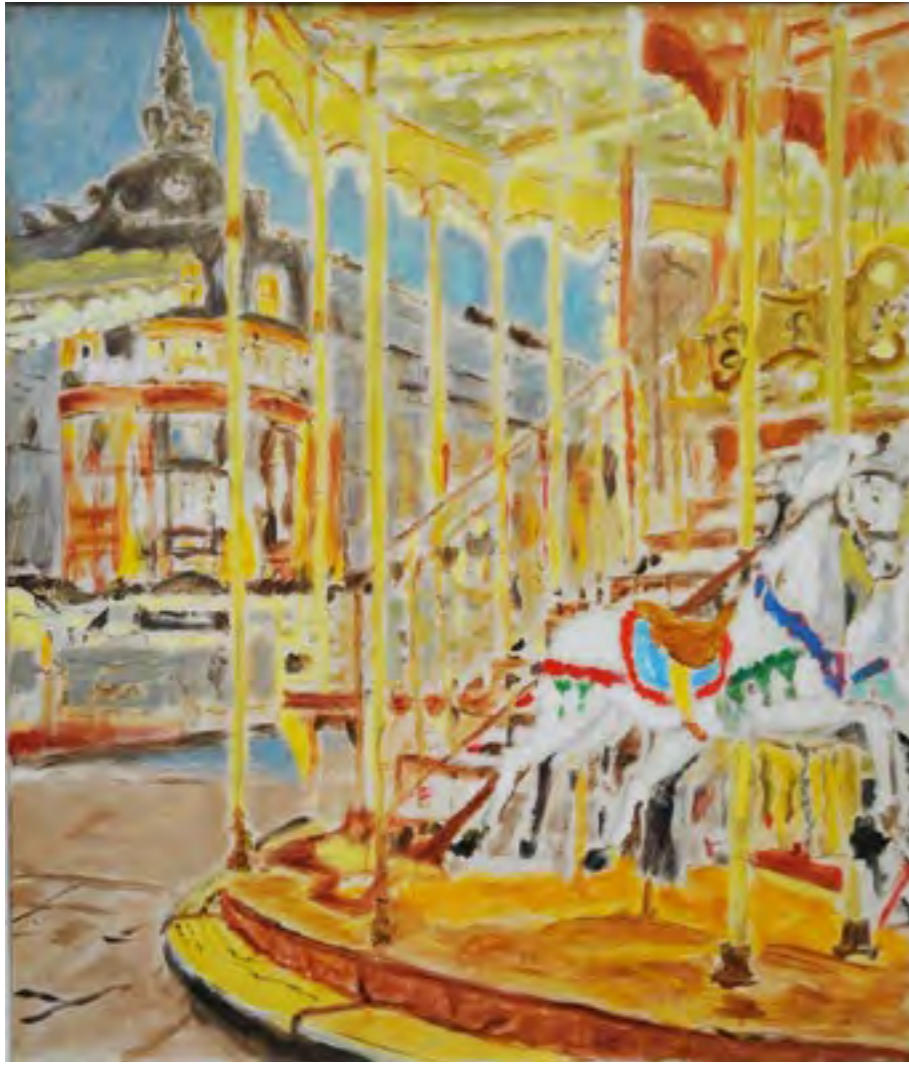
Vue sur le Jardin, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Boulangerie, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Macarons, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Carousel, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Flacons de Parfum, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



S Choco, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Vitrine avec Savon, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Bouquinistes II, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Coton Doux, 2019
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Japanese Themes, 2015
Oil on canvas
each 70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in
Photographed in the Women's Museum, Bonn 2015



Medinilla, 2015
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



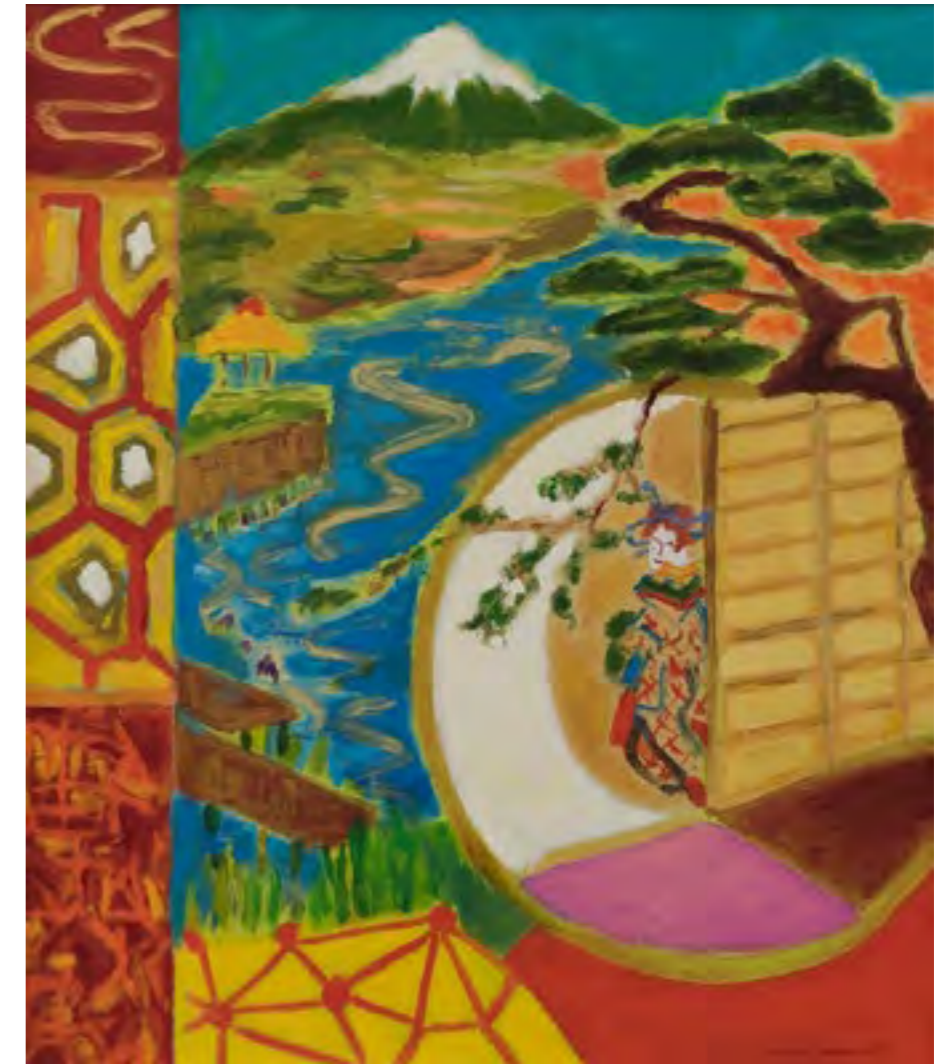
Medinilla No 2, 2015
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Scampi, 2015
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Sushi Geisha, 2015
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



After van Gogh, 2015
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Ghana Themes, 2019
Oil on canvas
each 70 x 60 cm/28 x 24 in



Smokey Earl Grey, 2017
Oil on canvas
180 x 220 cm/70 x 88 in



Fortnum & Mason, 2017
Oil on canvas
70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in



High Tea, 2017
Oil on canvas
70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in



Tea with Lemon Cake, 2017
Oil on canvas
40 x 40 cm/16 x 16 in



Vintage Tea Party, 2017
Oil on canvas
40 x 60 cm/16 x 24 in



Flower Shop, 2018
Oil on canvas
120 x 160 cm/47 x 63 in



L'air du Temps, 2017
Oil on canvas
120 x 160 cm/47 x 63 in

The Pottery Table, 2017
Oil on canvas
180 x 120 cm/71 x 47 in





Comme Chez Nous, 2017
Oil on canvas, Diptych
100 x 280 cm/39 x 110 in



Cat Days, 2017
Oil on canvas, Diptych
160 x 280 cm/63 x 110 in



Monkeyshine, 2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm/24 x 31 in



Let's Travel More, 2017
Oil on canvas
180 x 240 cm/71 x 94 in



Arabesque, 2014
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 cm/16 x 12 in





Montevideo Carneval I und II, 2017
Oil on canvas
each 120 x 160 cm/47 x 63 in





The Morning Room, 2017
Oil on canvas
40 x 40 cm/16 x 16 in



Vintage Shop, 2018
Oil on canvas
120 x 160 cm/47 x 63 in



Vitrine Parisienne, 2019
Oil on canvas
80 x 100 cm/32 x 40 in



Food Counter, 2019
Oil on canvas
80 x 180 cm/31 x 71 in



Behind the Screen, 2019
Oil on canvas, Diptych
80 x 200 cm/31 x 79 in

Works on paper





Tea Time, 2015
Watercolour on paper
100 x 70 cm/39 x 28 in



Art Deco, 2015
Watercolour on paper
100 x 70 cm/39 x 28 in



Belle Epoque, 2015
Watercolour on paper
100 x 70 cm/39 x 28 in



Interior in Pucatrihue Chile, 2017
Watercolour on paper
60 x 80 cm/24 x 31 in



In the Tree House, 2015
Watercolour on paper
70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in



English Breakfast, 2015
Watercolour on paper
70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in



Rouge et Noir, 2017
Mixed technique and collage on paper
70 x 100 cm/28 x 39 in



Cat in the Bath, 2019
Watercolour on paper
50 x 70 cm/20 x 28 in



Pistaches, 2019
Watercolour on paper
50 x 70 cm/20 x 28 in



Grandes Tasses, 2019
Watercolour on paper
50 x 70 cm/20 x 28 in



Susanne Kamps' studio at the Cite des Arts, Paris, 2019 (left) and she in the same studio in 2009 (right)

Biography

Born in 1967 in Munster, Germany

Studio in Dusseldorf, Germany

Art Education

1996-2001 Academy of Arts of Munster, Germany. Studied painting under Ludmilla von Arseniew and Herman-Josef Kuhna

2001 Master Student

2011 Chelsea College of Art, London

Awards and Grants

2021 Artist in Residence, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris

2019 Young Masters Art Prize – Winner of Highly Commended 3rd Prize, Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London

Artist in Residence, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris

2013 Artist in Residence, Ein Hod, Israel

2009 Artist in Residence, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris

2000 Sponsor Prize Exhibition, Academy of Arts of Munster

Art Fairs

2020 Scope New York 2020, Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London

Palm Beach Modern & Contemporary, Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London

2015 ArtFair 25, Womens' Museum, Bonn

Online exhibitions

2020 *Carry on Creativity*, Artsy online exhibition in support of UK charity Trussell Trust, Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London

Solo exhibitions

2020 Luedinghausen Castle, Germany [postponed due to COVID-19]

2019 Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris

Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz, Dusseldorf

2014 *Bed & Breakfast*, Art Guild of Worms, Germany

Bed & Breakfast, Art Guild of Schwetzingen, Germany

2013 *Pomegranate & Co*, Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod, Israel

2012 *Paint it Fresh!* Galerie fifty-fifty, Dusseldorf

2011 *Die subtile Urenkelin der Fauves*, Galerie Mai, Moers

Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz

Dusseldorf City Hall

2010 *25 Degrés en Hiver*, Finance Ministry of North-Rhine Westphalia, Munster

2009 Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz

2008 *25 Degrés en Hiver*, Ballhaus im Nordpark, Dusseldorf

2007 Galerie 48, Saarbruecken

Galerie Zone F, Berlin

2006 *Bilder 2005-2010*, Galerie Borutta, Recklinghausen

Bilder 2005-2010, Art Guild of Salzgitter

Art Guild of Alsdorf

2005 Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz, Dusseldorf

Kunstverein Oberhausen

2004 Galerie Borutta, Recklinghausen

Chamber of Commerce and Industry NRW, Dusseldorf

2002 MuensterArt-web 24

1998 Galerie Upstairs, Munster

Selected group exhibitions

2020 Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz, Dusseldorf [postponed due to COVID-19]

“Between Hunger and the Palace of Art: 175th Anniversary of the Dusseldorf Artists' Guild”, Dusseldorf City Museum

Das Kleine Format, Malkasten Art Guild, Dusseldorf

2019 *Young Masters Art Prize 10th Anniversary Exhibition*, Cynthia Corbett Galerie, London

2018 *Das Kleine Format „Künstler sehen Künstler“*, Malkasten Art Guild, Dusseldorf

2017 *Farbe bekennen*, Dusseldorf City Hall

Aufbruch, Artists' Guild, Dusseldorf

Keine Angst vor Schön, art e motion, Dusseldorf

Das Kleine Format „Bilder, die wir lieben“, Malkasten Art Guild, Dusseldorf

Sommer Salon, Plan D Gallery, Dusseldorf

Three Painter Exhibition, Atelier Alen, Munich

Israel Retrospective, Galerie am Eck, Dusseldorf

2016 *Offene Ateliers*, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf

Benefit Exhibition for Refugee Children, Dusseldorf City Hall

Malkasten Art Guild, Dusseldorf

2015 *Offene Ateliers*, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf

Galerie Peter Tedden, Dusseldorf

2014 *Offene Ateliers*, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf

2012 *Butterflöckchen*, Galerie Peter Tedden, Dusseldorf

Great Art Exhibition of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf

2011 Galerie Esther Klinghammer, Cologne

Galerie Conzen, Dusseldorf

Dusseldorf City Hall

2010 *Offene Ateliers*, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf

Inter Art, Galerie Reich, Cologne

Texts & Catalogues

- 2009 Art Guild of Unna
Sittart Galerie, Dusseldorf
- 2008 *Offene Ateliers*, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf
- 2007 Galerie Noack, Moenchengladbach
Galerie Niepel bei Morawitz, Dusseldorf
- 2006 *Best Friends*, Messe Magazine Publishers, Dusseldorf
- 2005 *Great Art Exhibition of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW)*, Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf
Cubus Art Hall, Duisburg
- 2004 *KLASSE! – Art of the Master Students of Prof Hermann-Josef Kuhna*, sponsored by WGZ Bank, Ruhrfestspielhaus, Recklinghausen
Offene Ateliers, Open Atelier, Dusseldorf
Art Summer, Art Guild of Oberhausen
- 2003 *The Paravent Project Berlin*, Galerie Burkhard Eikermann, Starke Foundation in Lions Palace, Berlin
The Paravent Project Vol. 2, Galerie Burkhard Eikermann, Dusseldorf
Great Art Exhibition of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf
- 2002 *Open Ateliers of the Gallery's Artists*, Galerie Burkhard Eikermann, Dusseldorf
- 2001 *Art Prize 2001*, Apollinaris, Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler

Critical Texts

- 2020 *Seductive Subversion: Susanne Kamps' Interior Views*, Prof Paula Burleigh, published online at www.susannekamps.com
- Time Present and Time Past: the uniting of temporal planes in the work of Susanne Kamps*, Anna McNay, AICA, published online at www.susannekamps.com
- 2016 *Figurative Kunst*, Thomas W Kuhn, AICA, at page 126 of *Abstraction & Figuration Zero Pop Art Junge Kunst: Gesammelt in Düsseldorf 1971 to 2016*, Collection of Heuking, Kuehn, Luer & Wojtek
- 2014 *Susanne Kamps*, Ralf Hartweg, Curator, WGZ Bank Art Collection, at page 73 of *Art Collection of WGZ Bank: New Acquisitions since 2006*
Bed & Breakfast, Dr Dietmar Schuh, Director, Art Guild of Schwetzingen, in *Susanne Kamps: Bed & Breakfast*
- 2010 *25 Degres en Hiver*, Christiane Dressler, in *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 2005-2010*
Susanne Kamps: Papierarbeiten an der Côte d'Azur, Prof Hermann-Josef Kuhna, in *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 2005-2010*
- 2005 *Starke Farben*, Prof. Hermann-Josef Kuhna, in *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 1996-2005*
- Mehr als eine Urenkelin der Fauves – Die subtilere Urenkelin der Fauves*, Prof. Manfred Schneckenburger, in *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 1996-2005*
- Susanne Kamps*, Ronald Puff, in *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 1996-2005*

- 2004 *Das Atelier als Flaechenornament*, Manfred Schneckenburger, at page 30 of *Katalog KLASSE! – Malerei von Meisterschülern der Klasse Prof. Kuhna*, WGZ Bank

Catalogues

- 2020 *Susanne Kamps: Behind the Screen, Paintings 2015-2019*, e-Katalog
- 2019 *Catalogue of the Young Masters Art Prize, Tenth Anniversary Exhibition*, London.
- 2016 *Abstraction & Figuration Zero Pop Art Junge Kunst: Collected in Dusseldorf 1971 to 2016*, Collection of Heuking, Kuehn, Luer & Wojtek, Dusseldorf.
- 2014 *Art Collection of WGZ Bank: New Acquisitions since 2006*, Düsseldorf.
Susanne Kamps Bed & Breakfast: Paintings 2011-2014, Art Guild of Schwetzingen.
- 2012 *Catalogue of the Great Art Exhibition of NRW*, Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf.
- 2010 *Susanne Kamps 25 Degres en Hiver: Paintings 2005-2010*, Dusseldorf.
- 2005 *Susanne Kamps: Paintings 1996-2005*, Dusseldorf.
Catalogue of the Great Art Exhibition of NRW, Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf, page 107.
- 2003 *Catalogue of the Great Art Exhibition of NRW*, Palace of Art Museum, Dusseldorf, page 131.

Bilder in öffentlichen und privaten Sammlungen

- German Re-Insurance Corporation, Dusseldorf
- DZ Bank (formerly WGZ Bank), Dusseldorf
- Heuking, Kuehn, Luer & Wojtek Law Firm, Dusseldorf
- Private Collection, Tel Aviv

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Paula Burleigh is the director of the Allegheny Art Galleries, and Assistant Professor of Art History at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Burleigh has a PhD in Art History from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Burleigh has been a Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and a lecturer at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Her writing has appeared in the Brooklyn Rail, Artforum.com, Stedelijk Studies, Art Journal, and in various edited volumes.

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