

VOYAGES, VESSELS & VAPORS



Essay by SUSIE KALIL

Sally Chandler's landscapes, interiors and still lifes come at us like some enchanting refrain. The deceptively simple paintings and works on paper appear to be the embodiment of romantic daydreams as they seemingly mix a fantasy world of whimsy and unapologetic beauty. Entering a room of her small lyrical images, arranged salon-style, is like taking a trip in time. Chandler approaches her medium with the effect of magical fairy dust. Paint becomes a vehicle for getting to somewhere that is not necessarily of this world but a place that lies somehow between the past and the future. What emerges is a world of her own invention: ice blue Alpine vistas and glistening snowflakes; frothy pink birthday cakes and grand canopy beds; dogs running on the beach; birds caught mid-air in mysterious free-fall; lush Versailles gardens and vast English country estates; horse-drawn coaches and sailing ships; burning candles and ornate chandeliers. Her decorative paradise is a theme park of the imagination. In a certain manner of speaking, within Chandler's eclecticism there is something for everyone. It is precisely the range of references and ideas that give her series, *A Collection of Memories*, a sense of communal openness. The works include odes to Marie Antoinette's private realms and JMW Turner's bird portraits for Farley Hall; a foxlike Spaniel on an evening stroll through St. James park and a mallard contemplating its reflection at water's edge.

In its pointed diversity, the series speaks to the notion of what an ethics of cultural production can mean—a dedication

to shifting the undervalued into the foreground of contemporary art. What distinguishes Chandler's art is that in addition to immersing us in a rich historical dialogue, her painting also supplies a sense of life. The results are landscapes and interiors that seem inherently fragile: fugitive environments that are always right on the edge of dissolution. Each captures a moment in which naivete coexists with profound philosophical ponderings—larger discussions triggered by the landscape, about desire, loss, beauty, the natural world and our place within it. Oscillating between abstraction and representation, composition and pattern, temporality and narrative, death and beauty, Chandler's paintings hold out the possibility of being recognized as objects that exceed our grasp without demeaning our longing.

A Collection of Memories is effective on an emotional as well as formal level and the union of these two elements, feeling and intellect, create a sense of nobility, a sense of past and present relationships having to do with time and space. The emphasis is on associations which contend with mainstream narrative structures. Connections are made between the macroscopic and microscopic, conveyed through painterly pyrotechnics, which include staining, dripping and stippling, as well as a palette of confectionary colors used in vibrating combinations. Her visual "narratives," vague though they are, describe some barrier crossed, a separation transcended, an intimate connection. They function less as stories with plots, however, than as implied narratives that operate on some dim, subliminal level.