

ARTFORUM

Maira Kalman

JULIE SAUL GALLERY

535 West 22nd Street, Sixth Floor

June 1-September 16

The county of Dorset in southwest England is characterized by rolling hills, rugged coastline, and wooded valleys. It's this idyllic landscape that serves as the subject for Maira Kalman's current show of ten gouache-on-paper paintings in the gallery's project room, which focus on the gardens and domestic curiosities of the region's stately, ancestral houses. (In the main space is a separate exhibition of paintings from Kalman's 2005 edition of Strunk and White's classic guide to writing, *The Elements of Style*.)

With illustrative flair and fondant-fancy colors, *Cream Teas, Sherborne Castle* (all works 2017) shows a Hyacinth Bucket-esque table setting in an elegant room, replete with plates of delicacies. In *Hear a HA HA, Kingston Lacy*, several women tour manicured pink flower beds, while in *Who Didn't Love This Place, Smedmore House*, a tweed-clad gentleman and his dog walk away from a group of cows relaxing before steep, seaward land. But no bucolic setting, however tranquil, is all that it seems, nor can it be a comprehensive reflection of its human denizens. What lies beneath polite surfaces is a recurrent theme in British culture, providing the basis for television series such as *Miss Marple* (1984–92) and *Midsomer Murders* (1997–), set in seemingly benign English villages that are home to treachery.



Maira Kalman, *Cream Teas, Sherborne Castle*, 2017, gouache on paper, 12 x 9".

Redolent of the rose-hued intrigue in Barbara Cartland novels or the protagonists of the board game *Clue*, the apparent Stepford cheerfulness of these works causes unease as to how safe the summer frosting is. Who is the food laid out for in that parlor? Why are all of the faces so solemn, unsmiling? What shadowy deeds are masked by the picturesque vistas and dainty treats of English country life—indeed, by the civilized facade of anyone's?

— Darren Jones