

ARTnews

reviews: national

Clare E. Rojas

Kavi Gupta

Chicago

In "Believe Me," a show of installations, large paintings, and small works on paper, San Francisco-based artist Clare E. Rojas continued to mash together faux-folkloric, figurative imagery and quilt patterns, lending the pieces a Pennsylvania-Dutch-craft-meets-street-art allure.

The strongest installation featured a black Shaker-style coatrack running the length of a dusty blue wall, with two dozen small gouaches in homemade stained-wood frames suspended from the rack's pegs. Like this cartoonishly stretched-out display, the pictures were compositionally simple and enhanced by fairy-tale strangeness. *Untitled (Strawberry Tree)*, 2009, for instance, shows a tiny girl in a

blue dress plucking from a tree a strawberry larger than her head.

In another installation, a bookcase was centered in front of a large wall covered in diamond-shaped wood panels stained yellow, red, and gray and arrayed in the form of a star-patterned quilt. The bookcase's middle shelf overflowed with pop-lit classics, from *Roots* to *Valley of the Dolls*, while the shelves above and below held portraits notable for the utter blankness of the facial expressions.

There was also a large-scale triptych evoking a classroom blackboard and featuring one of Rojas's early signature subjects—naked men. Yet for all the ingenuity of the installations, the power and magic of the show resided in the charming figurative works, which kept drawing the viewer ever closer. —Ruth Lopez



Clare E. Rojas, *Untitled (Strawberry Tree)*, 2009, gouache on paper, 10" x 8". Kavi Gupta.