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Books

Extra Virgin The Stained Glass of Judith Schaechter

By Alex Baker
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Imagine lurid images ripped from horror comics or gruesome tabloid stories and rendered with skill and emotional intensity in stained glass, and you have the singular vision of Judith Schaechter ⑧, who for more than two decades has enlisted a medieval art form to serve her idiosyncratic sensibility. More than 70 glass works and 8 graphite drawings by Schaechter from 1983 to 2006—depicting nubile child-women, mother-murderers and other characters in extremis—are reproduced in this monograph, with an essay by Alex Baker, curator of contemporary art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, that touches on her influences, techniques, narrative themes and aesthetic achievement.

In Schaechter's early works, she employed traditional stained glass methods, to which she was introduced at the Rhode Island School of Design and which freed her from the inhibitions she had

felt toward painting. But over the years, she has become an innovator in stained glass, synthesizing layering, engraving, collage, painting, photomechanical stenciling, sandblasting and digital technology so that her compositions are not restricted by the requirements of the stained glass medium.

As for the disturbing subject matter, Schaechter was always a figurative artist with a taste for the macabre, and as she matured, she sought out the punk scene where such expressions were celebrated. Explaining her affinity for this subterranean zeitgeist, Schaechter says in an interview with Baker: "There seemed to be a revolution where nerdy geeks could become famous. And I got interested in true crime and underground comics at this time. I suppose I was cresting the wave of a creepy subculture that surfaced in the 1980s... My painting teachers at RISD were all abstract expressionists—from the cult of the brushstroke. I am still rebelling against this. I was told that my style was too cartoony. I loved cartoons. And then I saw the East Village artists and I said 'look at them. They're getting away with it.'" —B.S.