

ARTIFACTOID



MOLARS IN THE SKY

By Alexandra Goldman

“I paint with my left hand,” Brooklyn-based Canadian artist Krista Louise Smith explained, after telling me about chronic pain that she experiences in her dominant right hand due to a rare nerve condition. Rather than feeling discouraged that her pain makes it difficult for her to paint righty, Smith has instead embraced the soft, childlike freedom that for her, could only have emerged with her less controlled, left hand painting. “With my right hand, I tended to be neurotic, second-guessing every brushstroke. With my left, I don’t impose those same judgments on myself, and let the paintings unfold more organically.”



Krista Louise Smith, *Blue Dream*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 68 inches.



Krista Louise Smith, *Lavender Night*, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 56 x 54 inches.

Softness is arguably an important quality when depicting clouds, Smith's chosen subject matter for her newest body of work. Her older work tended toward more realistic paintings and sculptures that represented the human figure. The new paintings feature mostly perky, individual clouds in layered, glowing cotton candy atmospheres, that exist somewhere between a cartoon realm and an idea of a cloud in the mind's eye rather than a photorealistic cloud or background of a Turner painting. "I paint with colors that I like and naturally gravitate toward, like baby blues and pinks," Smith said, reaffirming the self-judgment-free nature of her current artistic process. The exhibition title, *Sonnets of the Subconscious*, in which the paintings are now on view at [Carvalho Park](#) in East Williamsburg, reinforces the idea that the works don't necessarily depict the literal physical world.

In Smith's painting *Lavender Night*, a glowing tiny moon and subtle surrounding stars peek through a layer of whitewashed ultraviolet altostrati. She creates a sublime creamy world like that in Matthew Wong's 2019 painting *Morning Mist* on view earlier this winter at Karma Gallery.



Krista Louise Smith, *Float*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 68 inches.



Krista Louise Smith, *Dayglow*, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 68 inches.

In a recent studio visit with Smith, she shared that the only components of each painting she pre-plans are the general composition, and her color palette, which she assembles in advance by collaging paint swatches and pinning them to the wall. “The color palette I choose sets my parameters for each painting and it’s how I create cohesion in the piece as opposed to working with line.”

Dayglow is a good example of one of Smith’s paintings in which she uses oil crayon and pink/blue color layering to create texture and depth. While her brushstrokes are visible, the work doesn’t rely on the bravado of the gesture for its strength. Instead her hand creates a believable atmosphere, like a thick pastel humidity that you can breathe in.

In the center of the gallery, enveloped by Smith’s transcendent womb of cloud paintings, rests a floating plinth that supports *Bad Dreams*, a choreographed grid of 600 ceramic sculptures of abstracted teeth. The sculptures look like little living organisms that are about to jump up and begin dancing a tooth ballet the moment no one is watching. “I was going to the dentist a lot, and had teeth on my mind,” Smith explained. There is a refreshing purity, simplicity and directness that Smith translates into her artistic decisions.



Krista Louise Smith, *Bad Dreams* (detail), 2018 – 2020. 680 ceramic sculptures, dimensions variable.



Krista Louise Smith, *Bad Dreams* (detail), 2018 – 2020. 680 ceramic sculptures, dimensions variable.

Smith's teeth and clouds also strangely resemble each other. The tops of some of the ceramic teeth look like little clouds, and some of Smith's clouds looked like molars in the sky. Each ceramic tooth sculpture is unconventionally painted with acrylic paint made for porous surfaces rather than traditional glaze, which gives them a silky smooth pottery quality. As in the artist's own mouth, there are a few gold teeth that punctuate her sculpted dental display.

Sonnets of the Subconscious is on view at Carvalho Park until March 15.

All images in this article courtesy of Carvalho Park.

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