

Thomas Erben Gallery

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Art in Review

Rose Wylie

What With What

Thomas Erben Gallery
526 West 26th Street
Chelsea
Through Saturday

In her New York gallery debut, Rose Wylie, who is British, becomes the latest artist — and one of the few women — to enter the Jean-Michel Basquiat/Donald Baechler sweepstakes. She paints in a crude, faux-naïve style with slap-dash verve, offering up childlike renderings of figures and faces, the odd skull or cat.

The best painting here, and also the most recent, is “Christmas Fairy,” from 2008. Its guardianlike, orange-haired subject has bright pink wings but no neck, wears a conical skirt and is accompanied by what appears to be a very large blue dog that is probably a stuffed animal — just as the pronged column of black behind it is probably a Christmas tree. Also good is “Plastic Bride Profile & Cat,” in which these two motifs, rendered mostly in outline, crowd much of the available surface, leaving a channel of chartreuse between them.

Ms. Wylie’s titles are sometimes supplemented by captions written on the surface, as is amusingly the case with “Dot



THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY

“Christmas Fairy” (2008) by Rose Wylie, part of the artist’s exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery.

and Detail,” which depicts a headlike dot wearing another conical garment “and Dot’s torch,” or flashlight. This canvas might work perfectly well as a New Yorker cartoon, except that its vigorous combination of drawing and painting, which is more than equal to its weird wit, would be lost.

The twist is that Ms. Wylie is 76, attended art school in the 1950s and then earned an M.A. from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1981. For all I know she may have invented the Basquiat/Baechler sweepstakes. But it doesn’t really matter. Her work is very much her own and becoming more so. **ROBERTA SMITH**

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