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Art Reviews

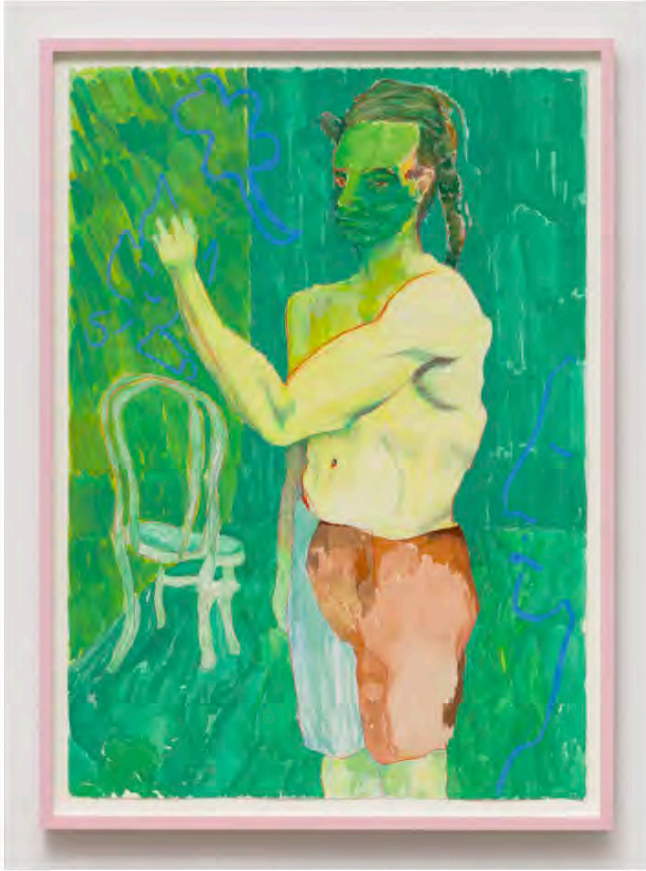
## Paintings of Nudes and Flowers, Dripping with Color and Quirk

by Carey Dunne



Alex Chaves, "Roses" (2016), ink, paint, colored pencil, and marker on paper (all images courtesy the artist and Martos Gallery)

Pastels, floral still lifes, and portraits of babies are about as safe and traditional as visual motifs come — they evoke a cutesy Hallmark aesthetic. But in *The Rose Period*, a series of paintings and mixed-media drawings on view at Martos Gallery, Los Angeles-based artist Alex Chaves gives these themes new, dimensional life.



Alex Chaves, "Painter" (2016) Ink, paint, colored pencil, and marker on paper (click to enlarge)

The show's title, a tongue-in-cheek reference to Pablo Picasso's early obsession with reds, oranges, pinks, and earth tones, alludes to the Modernist, post-Impressionist, and Expressionist influences Chaves blends in these canvases. In addition to overt Picasso homages — a harlequin appears in one dreamy landscape — echoes of Egon Schiele show up in moody, bony-shouldered figures, some set amid jungly, Paul Gauguin-esque backdrops.

It's the texture and riotous color here that makes what could be tired subjects fresh.

The application is loose and energetic,

never overwrought. The green-faced figure in "Painter" (2016) lifts a disproportionately small, nubbin-like hand, while a chair standing behind him is reduced to a shimmering outline. The paint in "Bedroom" is applied almost like scraps of construction paper, in solid-colored patches. At the center of "Baby Alex Baby," a self-portrait flanked by two haloed baby Buddhas, is a swath of citron yellow so bright it hurts your eyes. In the many still life paintings of flowers in vases, dappled brushstrokes create rippling movement; wormy bits of clay are used as petals; the word "ROSE" is scrawled repeatedly in a red background. In "Peter," a male nude, skin is rendered in a kind of camouflage pattern of pinks and yellows.





Alex Chaves, "Baby Alex Baby" (2016), oil on canvas

With all the blossoms and babies, it's a seasonally appropriate show, but there's just enough hallucinatory weirdness to offset any sentimentality. In the dreamy, Matisse-like interior "Bedroom," the floor opens up into a cloudy sky filled with wan green figures; the wiggling walls and bed frame seem to be melting. The characters in these paintings are not skipping, but floating through stoned hazes, into spring.

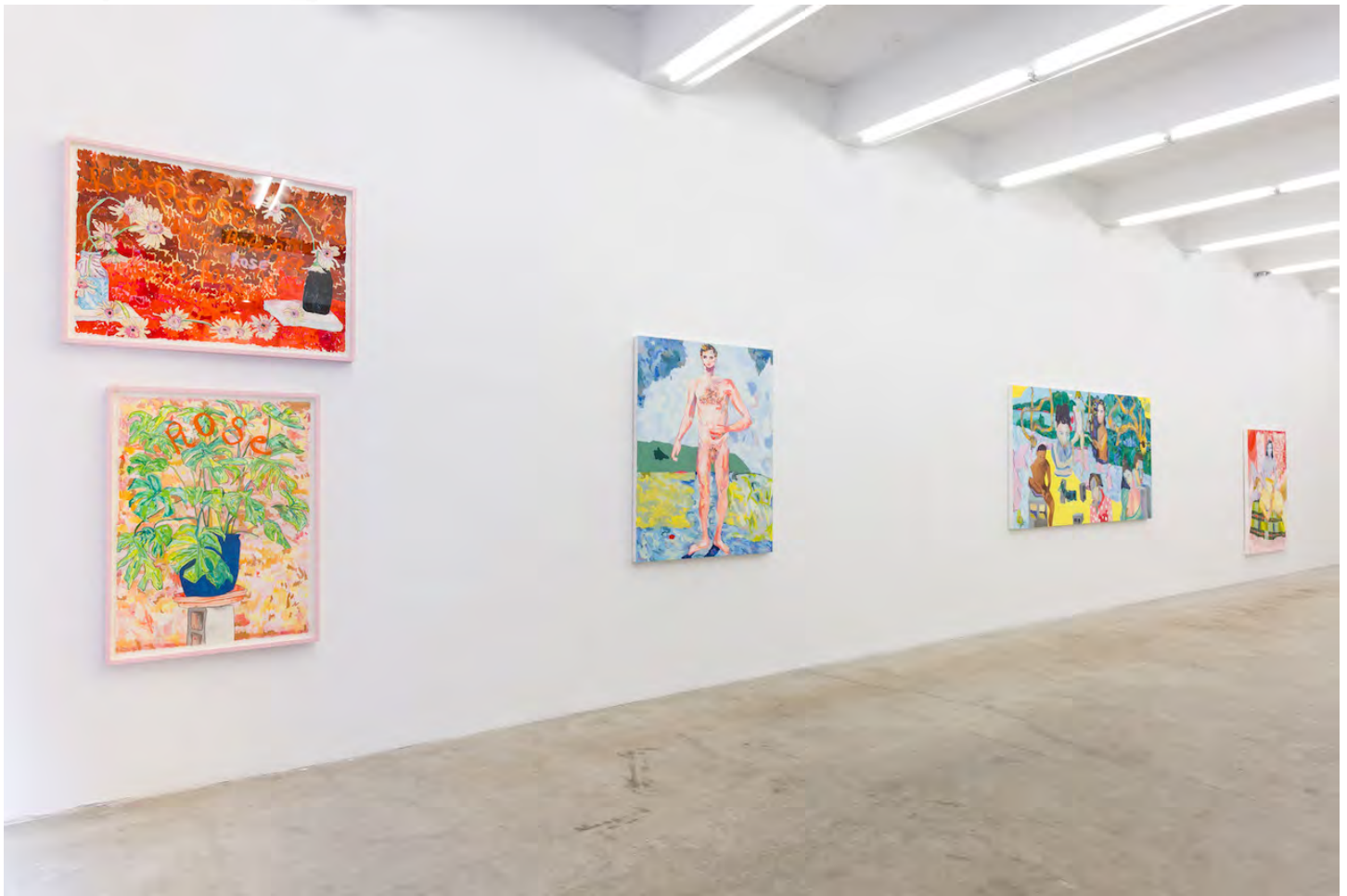


Alex Chaves, "Bedroom" (2016), oil on canvas



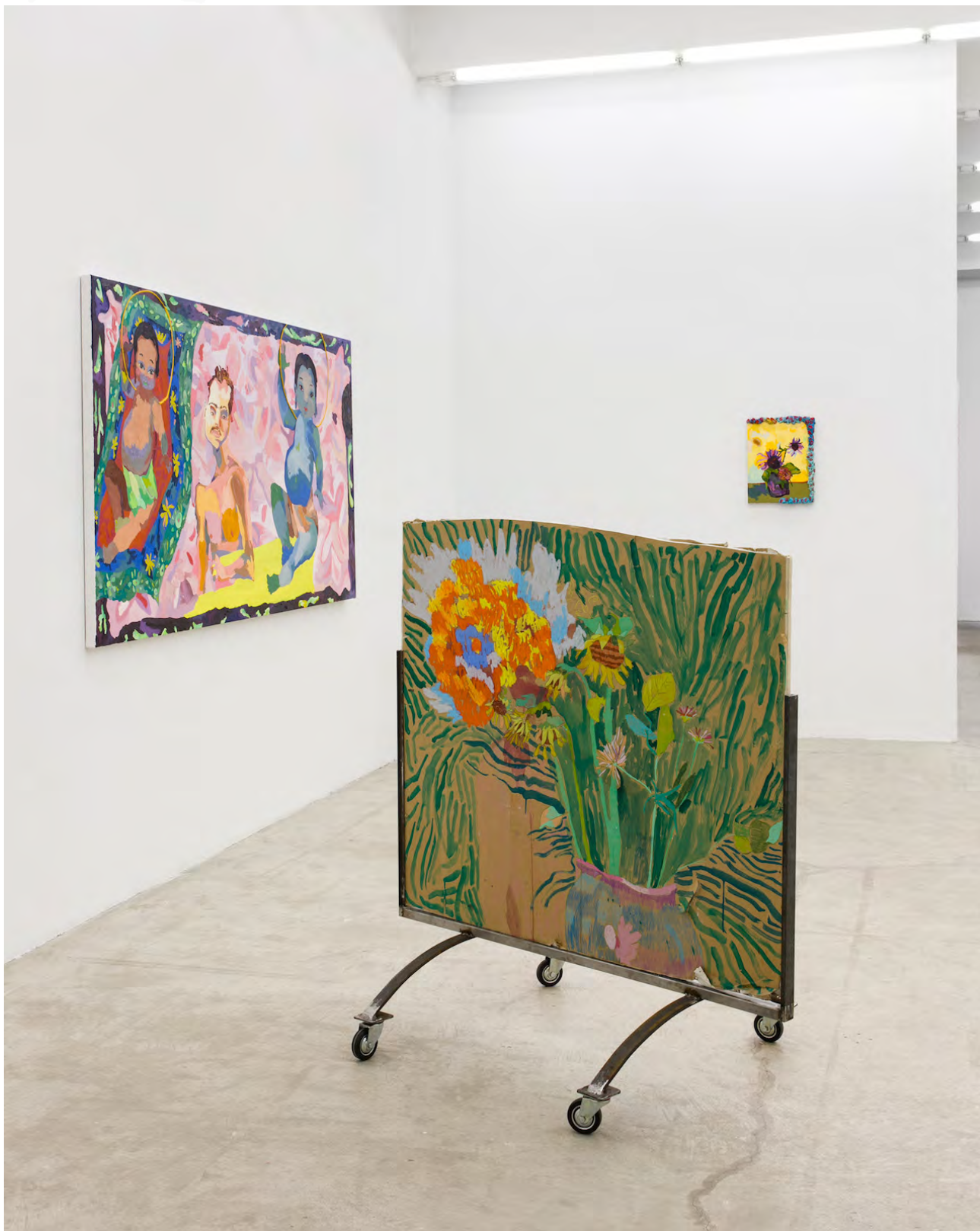


Alex Chaves, "Painter" (2016), ink, paint, colored pencil, and marker on paper



Installation view of Alex Chavez's 'Rose Period' at Martos Gallery





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*Alex Chaves's The Rose Period continues at Martos Gallery (540 West 29th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through April 23.*