



Sarah's Smoke  
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Originally published by Yoshii Gallery, New York in 1995

Republished in *The Importance of Being Iceland Travel Essays in Art* by Semiotext(e) in 2009

I went to art school because they had the good parties she said and then many years passed and she came up with this collection of quietly garrulous white paintings, and they are hanging here in her studio like a real bunch of oddballs, more like statuary, pretty mute. Underneath the surface of her big white paintings there's leaves moving, like a park or something. There's two big white ones pressing together like twin beds. I've never seen white paintings seem like such things. Not things about white or paint or austerity, but things about silence. Female silence. Steam. Hungry walls or paper, waiting. One can reduce the marks of paint or language to a single thing, a grubby little signature in time. But what's the thing that's just before. Her paintings hold a moment with awkward care. It's a comfy, itchy, prescient moment. I remember her paintings several years ago, black, and there were teeny pictures in them—riches, jewels, and occasionally an angry word, slut or something, was scrawled across. Clearly those paintings were after sex. In the throes of its pain. Do these have titles? I think of this as Maresfield Gardens and she told me some anecdote about living there, some place in England where she's not living now. She's pointing at a small one, Primrose Hill, two shades of white I see as sky and mud. I think of these as halls, she says. Even though it's outside. There's still a small picture inside every one, like a memory, making it hum with many stories, told or not. Her autobiography is ultimately mute. I saw this house by the side of the river (Cold Harbour) and its walls were torn out. You could see its wallpaper. I thought of it as art. It was this completely decayed place. I had gone down there on my bike. I saw it as my first adult experience, this vision of a house.

Sarah Rapson's sort of a dandy, but a female one which is about a powerful lack of plumage, which is meanwhile nearly sprouting from the top of her head. Many of her paintings are accomplished by a pile of them (paintings) being nailed together and then hung. It's like the princess and the pea. To be real she explains. I'm not a painter to do a big abstract thing, a huge single effort, but I'm fooling around with that. She smiles. These are sheets she points out and looking closely at the painting's edges you see the faint blue lines of its trim. Somewhere there's a scorch which implies ironing board. It's not an ironic attempt to aestheticize domesticity, but a lumpily awe-inspiring job. Is it possible for paintings to feel like something's rubbing from inside. The noise of that, not exactly some anchoress etching her messages, no. But she told me quite a lot about the time before she became really sexual, there was this time of simply being nothing. Were you waiting? No, I just wasn't anything at all. She didn't offer me a drink, any tea, and certainly not any big fluffy bismark like the painter who died. To her credit it didn't even occur to me to ask for some treat, to be thirsty. Do you smoke I asked Sarah. No, she replied. Did you quit. No, I just never did. Looks great, she admits. I'd probably love it. She laughs at a vice untried.