

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Dingle's return is delicious

By DAVID PAGEL
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In the 1990s, Kim Dingle made a name for herself as one of L.A.'s best painters. She bought a big raw studio space in Eagle Rock, where she could paint and restore her British sports cars. But things didn't go as planned.

One morning, Dingle's desire for a cup of strong hot coffee got the best of her. With nowhere to get one in the neighborhood, she opened and ran Fatty's. The vegetarian wine bar consumed every waking minute of her life, leaving no time to work on cars, much less make paintings. The loudest voices in the art world greeted these developments with I-told-you-so-sanctimony, wagging their fingers at Dingle for trying to do more than was humanly possible.

At Kim Light/Lightbox, Dingle's first solo show in Los Angeles in 10 years demonstrates that if you're sufficiently talented, you can eat your cake and have it too. "The Cake Series" reveals an artist at the top of her game. Its 11 deliciously sophisticated — and disarmingly simple — oils on linen suggest that Dingle's hiatus from painting not only did not diminish her art, but sharpened its focus and amplified its resonance.

In the larger of two galleries, nine mid-size paintings (all 5 feet by 4 feet) depict anonymous little girls abandoning their manners, their civility, their very selves to the all-or-nothing intensity of pure, animal satisfac-



Ed GLENDONKING Kim Light/Lightbox

DIGGING IN: Civility and manner is set aside by the subjects in Kim Dingle's "The Cake Series" at Kim Light/Lightbox.

tions. Some dive headfirst into cakes that are just about as big as they are. Others bury their faces in thick gobs of frosting. One nuzzles up to a big gray cake — like an exhausted lover or hibernating bear cub. And another collapses, like a drunk in the street. In every juicy painting, pleasure takes the upper hand and food gets the best of the girls.

There's something feral in Dingle's daintily dressed lasses, whose sweetness, vulnerability and innocence are all the more real for existing alongside feroc-

ity, wildness and forget-the-consequences decisiveness.

The same goes for the way Dingle paints.

Some of her pictures are better than others. Although all are dated 2007, it isn't difficult to guess the rough sequence in which they were finished. The early ones look a little stiffer, more carefully composed and properly realized. They suggest an old pro working off the rust and getting back into the groove. The most recent are the loosest, the blurriest, the most furiously rendered. In them, painterly

abandon and pictorial coherence play tug of war. Dingle handles the violent to-and-fro with graceful élan, juicing up the drama with casual confidence.

Two of the boldest paintings occupy the smaller gallery. A diptych shows the aftermath of a birthday party, and a single-panel painting depicts a figure slumped alone, her shoulders slumped and head bent in the posture of a penitent from a medieval or Renaissance religious painting. Chocolate is all over the place, dripping excrementally. Empathy is the predominant sentiment.

Dingle's mundane subjects allow her to address big issues without getting heavy-handed. Philip Guston did something similar with his cartoonish paintings of hooded figures. If Charles Schulz and Willem de Kooning had collaborated, their works might resemble Dingle's. But if they ran a restaurant, it wouldn't be anything like Fatty's.

Kim Light/Lightbox, 2656 S. La Cienega Blvd., (30) 900-1111, through Dec. 8. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.kimlightgallery.com

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