

IMPULSE

REVIEW APR 19 - WRITTEN BY THEODORA BOCANEGRA LANG

Sealed Spirits



Each work in [Emma Rose Schwartz's](#) current show at [Derosia](#) recalls a fairy-tale, in between childhood and imagination. Young girls with thick tumbling hair appear around the gallery, though never entirely revealed. The title of the exhibition, "The Missing Link In Modern Spiritualism," takes its name from the 1885 book by A. Leah Underhill. In line with du jour curiosity about spirits, the author recounts peculiar occurrences and eerie anecdotes, thereby providing the "missing link," or a kind of proof of the other world. Underhill recounts her five-month-old nephew writing a note that reads, "I love this little boy. God bless his mama. . . I am happy," with a pencil apparently placed in his hand by an "invisible agency." Schwartz's paintings are similarly interested in the magical powers of children and animals, allowing them to pass through the flimsy film of this world into the next.

In *Define Figment* (2025), the head of a toddler rests on a pillow. Wearing a long pointed hat resembling a strawberry, the child's mouth is covered by the berry's bright green leaf. The figure recalls the flower fairy illustrations by [Cicely Mary Barker](#), first published in 1923, showing what were once considered to be evil and devious entities as innocent children, each embodying a different plant or flower (including a strawberry fairy). The strawberry top could be seen as a pacifier, sucked on by a baby, but as is the case with all of Schwartz's paintings, the surface is deeply scratched and worn, and with *Define Figment*, especially over the face. Schwartz reverts the fairy's common innocuous, infantile association, showing the magical child trapped or gagged. It is unclear whether the child is contained for her own protection or for ours.

Every painted girl or creature appears bewitched. *Morning Inside a Chest of Drawers* (2025) consists of two touching panels, each a drawer in the titular chest. The right panel is a textured dirty cream with a thick border around the edges, recalling Jo Baer's minimalist works from the 1960s of pale canvases emptied of centers. The left canvas is similar, though squeezed into the top are three sleeping girls, only their heads visible. Crammed into a corner, they are small enough to inhabit furniture, evoking folklore of spirits trapped in houses and objects or childhood stories of mice making a home out of a shoe.



The canvases are dirty. Far from glossy gestural works, the paintings consist of scratched-out layers, scraped and sullied to build complex and evocative textural surfaces. The works look like they have been left outside for a few days or attacked by animals. Coupled with the mischievously glinting girls contained within, the scratchy layers look like evidence of a struggle between artist and painting, subject and frame. What lies within is trying to escape, and perhaps Schwartz is trying to keep them in.



The artist uses the full length and width of each canvas, using them to visually contain her subjects. Each work has a structure, usually occupying the background, that stretches across the full available space. Coupled with full-frontal perspective, the works do not just depict containers, but *are* containers. Each work seems to barely trap living spirits: things mysteriously magical, sometimes sinister. *In On It* (2025) shows a long, low structure reaching across the background, dark and shadowy. In the foreground is a dead crow, the same size as the faraway structure. The largest work, which shares its title with the exhibition, depicts a peaceful herd of chocolate brown deer, grazing against an inky blue night. Near the top of the canvas is the same long structure spanning the width above the deer.

The surface of the work is less scratched than that of the crow, but no less complex. Far from flat, it ripples with papery tweaks and waves with nebulous sprays of glitter across filmy crinkles. The crow seems to show the aftereffects of a curse; something malevolent has already happened—perhaps an omen. The deer are part of a peaceful and mystical scene, though the hovering building remains ominously looming. Above the building, the paint stops, revealing an inch or two of scuffed-up canvas; the paint cannot continue past the dark form. Most deer here are interested in their grass, but one in the center lifts its head and directly stares out of the painting with knowing eyes.



Emma Rose Schwartz: *The Missing Link In Modern Spiritualism* is on view at Derosia from March 8 through May 3, 2025.

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SPIRITUALITY - FIGURATIVE - GESTURE - SOLO EXHIBITION



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