

## Ann Agee

Locks

Philadelphia

Ann Agee addressed the formal aspects of several media with aplomb and style in the show "Rules of the Pattern," which was made up of three distinct but related bodies of work. A pair of murals depicted domestic interiors, painted in bright, flat colors on enormous sheets of mulberry paper. Each unframed scene draped down the walls of the gallery in several vertical panels that curled gently onto the floor like unfurled rolls of wallpaper. The stark, unpeopled kitchen and living area are a pastiche of decorative periods, with cane-seated chairs, Beaux-Arts moldings, garish wall coverings, and a stainless-steel sink.

The deep, angular perspectives of the paintings set a stage for Agee's elaborate all-white porcelain vases massed on tabletops, their over-the-top frilly ornamentation contrasting with the purity of their glassy white finish. A wall-mounted shelf presented a related array of clear-glazed porcelain figurines in odd, contemporary versions of *comedia dell'arte* costumes. These elegantly constructed figures exhibited elements of self-portraiture. Their props, costumes, and gestures draw upon the conventions of 18th-century decorative arts. Watteau came to mind as the point of reference for Agee's narrative imagery.

The third body of work was a series of three symmetrical wall groupings of traditional blue-and-white platters. Each display had a distinctive subject, repeated on each dish. In one group, paintings of bedrooms reiterated the domestic subject matter from Agee's wallpaper works.

The themes here—of the historical conventions of art envisioned through contemporary eyes and of the merging of decorative and fine arts—were further unified by a mood of lavish, self-conscious melancholy layered onto the sparkling, virtuoso artifice. —**Robin Rice**



Ann Agee, *Vases* (front), 2009–10, glazed porcelain; *Kitchen* (back), 2006, flashe and acrylic on mulberry paper, dimensions variable, installation view. Locks.