

NY CULTURE

# Comfort Food for the Soul and Drunk on Pulp Fiction

Soothing paintings by John Evans, Mexican pulp art and labor-intensive works by Hadieh Shafie



John Evans's 'The Queen and Her Court,' 2015, is on view at Henoch. PHOTO: GALLERY HENOCH

By **PETER PLAGENS**

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## John Evans

Henoch

555 W. 25th St., (917) 305-0003

Through March 28

The tasteful semiabstract paintings by Boston-based artist John Evans (b. 1945) bring to mind Matisse's famous dictum that his own pictures should be considered "a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." This particular series of 12 paintings was inspired by a visit to botanical gardens in Palm Beach, Fla., and features Mr. Evans's considerable adeptness at using the brush, palette knife, or roller to apply oil paint, his crisply sensitive compositions, and his indirect but convincing manner of evoking the likes of water lilies and lotuses. Mr. Evans's color—a lot of gray and sedate blues garnished with edible greens—is restrained and knowledgeable; he knows just where to place his hotter, bolder chromatic accents.

If his paintings were music, they might be called middle-of-the-road, which would be considered an insult by most denizens of the New York art world. But a good deal of serious contemporary painting and sculpture—made by very intelligent, talented and skilled artists—resides there, in a place between dig-in-your-heels realism and aggressively awkward and overbearing abstraction seeking to be "edgy" by being either visually hard to take or intellectually hard to fathom. Mr. Evans is emphatically in-between, conscientiously employing the consensus lessons of modern painting to produce something restful. Armchairs aren't built to be exciting. Their forte is comfort and calm, which Mr. Evans furnishes in abundance.

—Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.