

9/10/2014 at 8:00 PM 14 Comments

The Saltz Cornucopia: 10 Fall Art Shows, Reviewed

By Jerry Saltz



Williamsburg's Pierogi Gallery

Between Thursday and Saturday, over 150 exhibitions opened in New York, and so, this past weekend, overcoming my social anxieties about being around so many people after a quieter summer and knowing everyone else would look just as shell-shocked from the close contact, I ventured into the trenches of autumn. My own General Law of Quality has it that 85 percent of all shows are bad. I believe this Law is a constant, that 85 percent of the art made in the Renaissance was bad, too. What makes art so interesting is that your 85 percent of bad will be totally different from my 85 percent, all the way down the line. The good news about the first days of fall is that while many of the shows might be *meh*, none were egregious. And while space and deadlines don't allow me to cover shows that opened on the Lower East Side on Sunday, that day in that neighborhood was wonderful and felt for that moment like the art world belonged to the art world again (more on those shows later this week).

An auspicious omen started my season in Chelsea. At my first stop, Koenig & Clinton, I walked in right behind living national treasure and should-be MacArthur recipient John Waters. Repressing my stalker-fanboy impulse once I got inside, I relished **Lily van der Stokker's** hard-core show of all-pink paintings, sculptures, murals, installations — all done in linear scribbles on cloud-shaped canvases or excremental blobs. Van der Stokker's one-time dealer, the late Hudson (of Feature Gallery), observed that her colors are like those found on feminine-hygiene products. Van der Stokker loved the idea.

Many of the works sport words. One lumpy wall-work is emblazoned with a fierce feminist message: "Only yelling older woman in here. Nothing to sell." When read the way cops tell us to move us on from the scene of a crime, van der Stokker is saying that art judged mainly "female" is dismissed as strident and girly and isn't worth buying. I'm pretty sure the little painting that just says "Aunty Roberta and Uncle Jerry" is friendly. Regardless, van der Stokker's hand is as marvelous as Kusama's, and her mind is as sharp as Kruger's. Even if it's a bit repetitive and visually limited, this show bullet-proofed me against tepid art for almost the next two days. Now, if only Waters would know who I was.

At Jack Shainman, **Nick Cave** makes a welcome move from his fabulous feathered headdresses to politically loaded objects — three beige trench coats with open fronts, fashioned from his usual vocabulary of ceramic and porcelain trinkets and other things shiny or sporting dazzling color. On each, there are cascades of watches, chains, medallions — bling of every variety. These *Hustle Coats* must weigh a ton, and speak to alternative economies, working in the shadows, flashers, internal burdens, preconceived notions, and flimflam men. There is also a large sculpture featuring an old, grotesque black mannequin splayed atop a huge pile of afghan blankets. He's like some transgender nightmare American *Olympia*. I love that Cave is moving on from his sweet, mysterious, fashion schtick. The show singses your eyebrows. It is titled *Made*

by Whites for Whites.

Another kind of singeing comes in **Scott King's** show at Bortolami. This Brit gives us multiple photographs of some sort of tower in an English city, a multi-paneled, wall-mounted comic strip, and a mirrored monument that reflects and echoes the photos. This is King's take on the art world's navel-gazing tendency — its susceptibility to thinking that a fancy public sculpture by a famous artist can fix dying cities and blighted neighborhoods. In the comic strip, King imagines middlebrow artists Anish Kapoor and Anton Gormley, both of whom are regularly paid millions for their public projects that supposedly "regenerate" rundown cities, being asked by the Afghan president to save Kabul by erecting public sculptures. The strip's last frame finds Obama bombing the sculptures. So that's a happy ending.

At Bravin Lee, a sad ending — the exhibition of the late artist and my Huckleberry friend, **Jennifer Wynne Reeves**. Her thick, rich, small-scale, kaleidoscopic paintings sport objects or text that tell tales of sex, love, loss, and anger. She depicts smoking boats lost in abstract storms, rainbows over rooms with no roofs. This jewel of a show confirms that a well-selected, small museum survey of Reeves's work would give a lot of artists a lot to think about. Good-bye, self-burning, driven ship.

Old-school sexiness — or what's now called *normcore* — beckoned at the packed **Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition** at the all-time DIY champion Williamsburg gallery, Pierogi. A zillion small works pepper the wall, many by stalwarts like Dawn Clements, Michael Ballou, Jennifer Dalton, Ward Shelley, and others. The space has long been run by art-world champions Joe Amrhein and Susan Swenson, who, through all the booms and busts of the neighborhood, have managed to keep going and stay relevant and not just be a refuge for "Williamsburg artists" (the self-justifying ossification that usually

sets in at these outposts). My best-in-show — and maybe best-in-Brooklyn — prize goes to Andrew Ohanesian for his full-scale fake scaffolding erected outside the gallery. Complete with an illustration of a fake new future luxury condominium (called “The Rook”) and fabricated work permits with the names of anonymous-sounding Chinese holding companies, it is the perfect signifier for the demons of development that always nip at New York's heels. They should put these fake scaffoldings up on every street in Williamsburg as a fair warning. But, as one art dealer who will soon have to vacate his space due to skyrocketing rents put it when I asked him, “But where can you all go?” He paused and said, “The art world always finds a way.” He's right.

On Saturday, I went back to Chelsea, into the belly of the art-world beast. I love Chelsea. I hate Chelsea. A gallery isn't bad just because it's located there; a gallery isn't better because it's in Bushwick. And self-righteous purity and finger-wagging are worse than upfront marketeering. Still, on Saturday, despite lovely moments, I found myself ready to put up a big billboard addressed to the four megagalleries, Hauser & Wirth, Pace, Zwirner, and Gagosian. It would just say, “You win. Chelsea is yours. Take it. We need you to do that thing you do. We like you. We're all just going to move on. Or we're all going to work for you.”

But there are good shows here. At Mitchell-Innes & Nash, art-world gypsy-photographer **Justine Kurland** exhibits pictures of mechanics and garages taken all across this country. None of them are composed in your typical boring art-world format, around one person, usually of one ethnic, racial, sexual, or economic type, or one variety of object — tools, buildings, vehicles, electric chairs. (The result is a feeling of claustrophobia and being hemmed in by precisely what the artist wants you to see and feel.) Kurland's medium-size images, by contrast, are all taken from some existential Giacometti-like middle distance of around nine-and-a-half feet. Sometimes you don't know what you're looking at, or who, or why. You sense her aura, but know no one's performing for her. The work is a mysterious portrait of maleness in the face of the end of an era of mechanical things.

At Derek Eller, painter **Despina Stokou** lands a caustic punch on what one hopes will soon be the end of an annoying era: Our time of the so-called “art flippers,” who collect art like they are trading commodities. She zeroes in on one infamous, unctuously ubiquitous West Coast promo man using disgusting snippets and bits taken from public information.* Stokou's gluts of grimy writing on canvas become paintings that make you want to take a shower ... in a good way.

At Marianne Boesky Gallery — which the following day opened a great new outlet on the Lower East Side — **Roxy Paine** gives us a handful of super-finely worked maple sculptures of things like scales, telescopes, machines, and chainsaws. It is the exact type of hyperrealism with a twist on either scale, color, or material that I have absolutely no feeling for and mostly don't like. While, much this stuff isn't for me, the gigantic installation in the back room is a show-stopper: a huge diorama of an airline-security gate, complete with X-ray machines, conveyor belts for baggage, baskets for your clothes and shoes, plastic-lined wastepaper baskets for confiscated containers of liquid, and security cameras. The whole horrible ball of airline-travel wax. The scale and verisimilitude dazzle; the forced fake perspective seduces. People stop at it and gawk in wonder. I did, too. Twice that day, just to make sure. It's still not for

me, but the Natural History Museum should buy this so that in 50 years, people can look at all of this equipment and think, *What were all those things?* The banality of the space alone will be something to behold.

At Gagosian's 24th Street space — the Oz, the top of the food chain — is **Dan Colen**'s show of nine large paintings all based on backgrounds from Walt Disney's animated film *Fantasia*. In a laudatory online review of this show that appeared earlier that day, a critic wrote that I "gnashed" at Colen's last terrible show of kicked-over motorcycles, an upside-down skateboard ramp, and paintings made with chewing gum and confetti. So I tried my best to embrace this work. I like Colen. At a recent Gavin Brown opening, he ribbed me, saying, "Hey, stop being so hard on me." I laughed back and said, "Don't be a bad winner. It doesn't seem to have hurt your career." (Gnash, gnash.) The conceptual underpinning is pretty nifty, I guess — these are paintings that, based on a real film that is also an American animated classic, live between realism and abstraction. And all the work is handsome, well made, and professional-looking. The problem is that the paintings, their surfaces, and structures are so familiar, dull, and unoriginal that the work looks like it could have been made by a second-tier, third-generation 80-year-old Abstract Expressionist. Lots of art-world people like this work, and I'm told the paintings are selling like hotcakes for a reported half-million dollars a pop. I know; I didn't bring up price with anyone else. So maybe I am gnashing a little.

My last stop of the day was across from another one of Gagosian's many Temples of Art, to one of the bottoms of the food chain. If I had to recommend just one thing in Chelsea so far this September, it would be **Jen Catron and Paul Outlaw's *One Stop Shopping Souvenir City and Chelsea Bus Tour***. The "show" is a sky-blue mini-double-decker van with the faces of art-world movers and shakers, like Marina Abramovic, Klaus Biesenbach (saying "I do not like it"), Richard Serra, Larry Gagosian, and Jeff Koons. Inside, this magic bus is tricked out with art-world tchotchkes and keepsakes — trinkets like a baby bib with a Christopher Wool text emblazoned on it or Vito Acconci lube. Upstairs there are seats, and Jen and Paul will be your guides to a driving tour of Chelsea. They're also bringing in famous guest-guides. These two bighearted, smart artists have been kicking around the art world for the last few years; I saw them last year in a gallery strapped to some sort of Catherine Wheel being dipped into honey mustard (Outlaw does a mean BBQ). Hurry, seats are selling out. My wife and I may conduct a tour for them. We're thinking of calling it "The Cats and Dogs Tour of Chelsea." The art world always finds a way.

* *An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that Despina Stokou's work used material from private emails. All of the information used in her pieces is publicly accessible.*