

Fantasy, Melancholy and Angst:

By Miriam Kienle and Joelle Jensen

Three concurrent solo exhibitions at Feigen Contemporary featuring artists Jennifer Coates, Susanne Simonson and Nick Blinko form a divine comedy, conjuring visions of heaven, hell and purgatory. Coates' celestial landscapes are infused with brilliant color and soft radiance; Simonson's paintings of spectral figures exist between murky realms of longing, memory and physicality, and Blinko's drawings depict demonic domains where piety has gone awry. Although disparate in tone, each artist presents a psychological terrain replete with nostalgic expressiveness.

Coates paints fantastical environments where atmospheric abstraction merges with detailed geometric or organic patterning. Tangled clusters creep into many of the landscapes, like kudzu beginning to blanket the topography. In Creeper vine-like forms disintegrate into a biomorphic field just below the horizon line. A brightly colored, tangled organism rises up from the dark pool that divides the painting in half. Coates' work is ripe with mystical implications. In Softwall a faceted, multi-colored cloud pulsates above a dark void, emerging like an epiphany. Mythical landscapes, which combine amorphous natural forms, thin fields of color and dense areas of precision are reminiscent of Laura Owens and Peter Doig. Some of Coates' works, including Softwall, have the potential to distinguish the artist from her contemporaries, while others simply strike a chord within a prevalent movement.

Simonson's adjacent images show figures in peril, trapped between worlds. Like fleeting moments of stereoscopic vision, her photo-based paintings depict vaporous figures merging with ambiguous objects. Unlikely planes overlap to create settings of disquietude. The artist uses broad swaths of bright color to punch-up muted, fluid under-paintings. The paintings are most successful when they elude the flatness of the photographs from which they are derived and reveal complex areas of flux. In Winter Silence Simonson superimposes shifting profiles of a youthful face and layers of wistful expression to form a modeled bust. This unstable figure floats atop a transparent cube, which contains a winter landscape and encapsulates a strong sense of melancholia.

While Simonson contends with the world as mirage, Blinko plunges into an underworld of his own creation. Blinko, front man for the band Rudimentary Peni, creates anxiety-ridden dystopias rife with religious iconography, weaponry, crowds of scowling masks and death. Blinko's masculine, gothic, punk rock sensibility dominates pages torn from notebooks of his tight, maniacal mark-making. The works in the exhibition that are more literal fulfill our expectation of "schizophrenic drawing," like Birth of the Mad Babies or Boneyard Eruption. An untitled drawing distinguishes itself as scrawling marks give way to deliberate line-work, articulating a red billowing sky. To equal success, the geometric logic of Ununtitled II (Minutiae Marginalia) harnesses what threatens to be an entropic scene.

Blinko's grotesques, like Simonson's wraithlike figures and Coates' surreal landscapes, explore realms of the human psyche through distinct alter-realities. Fantasy, melancholia and angst merge as Feigen Contemporary captures a menagerie of the supernatural in three divergent exhibitions.

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