

ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

JULY 7, 2016

‘Intimisms’

*James Cohan Gallery**533 West 26th Street, Chelsea**Through July 29*

The title of “Intimisms,” an excellent group show of figurative painting, pluralizes Intimism, the early modernist style best exemplified by the small, sometimes fraught domestic interiors of Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard. At a moment when so much art is for public consumption, the works here convey the intimacy of bodies, faces, emotions, touch and love.

Representing 26 artists from several generations, the show is organized by the gallery and the painter Aliza Nisenbaum. From the past, Jane Freilicher’s “Flowers in Armchair” (1956) and Fairfield Porter’s “The Bedroom” (1949) are exceptional. In an Alice Neel group portrait of the Fugs (1966), the band seems to be singing just for us. Henry Taylor’s forceful “Fawn Rogers” (2015) all but picks up Neel’s mantle.

Like Porter, numerous younger artists take us into the bedroom, often casting us as intruders, as in Benjamin Degen’s close up of a flushed woman sleeping. In rich colors and full forms that distantly evoke Léger, GaHee Park’s “Night Talk” features mysterious meldings of bodies, rooms, old-fashioned telephones and

paintings within paintings. Ridley Howard portrays tender lovemaking in settings stripped of detail. Nicole Eisenman's 1994 "Self-Portrait With Mr. Monopoly" conjures a moment of quiet existential terror, while Joan Brown's "Twenty to Nine" (1972) depicts a woman who may be weeping sitting at a restaurant table with wine glasses for two. We see only the hands of two people building a fire in a new work by Giordanne Salley. Jordan Casteel zeros in on a woman resting her left hand on her knees; the title, "Mom Hand," speaks volumes.

There is much to linger over, especially Anna Glantz's portrait of a bare-chested, vulnerable young man. Sylvia Sleigh's 1970 portrait — the same subject in a different mood — might have been painted yesterday.

ROBERTA SMITH

Bas Jan Ader

Metro Pictures

519 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 5

The Dutch-born artist Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975) had a minor international following in the 1970s, disappeared from the radar in the 1980s, and reappeared in the 1990s as a myth. The myth is based on a relatively small body of work, much of it on view now in a Metro Pictures show that amounts to a rough-cut career survey. Mostly, though, the artist's reputation rests on the facts of his life, as elucidated in Alexander Dumbadze's 2013 book, "Bas Jan Ader: Death Is Elsewhere."

In 1944, the artist's father, a Protestant minister and member of the Dutch Resistance, was executed by a Nazi firing squad for sheltering Jews. Bas Jan Ader himself, in his work, had an investment in the subjects of danger and loss. As a teenager, he alternated art study with risky adventure, as when he signed on as one of a two-man crew sailing a small boat from Morocco to California. He settled in Los Angeles, and there, and on trips back to Europe, he created a series of photographed and filmed performances. In one, he rolled off the roof of a two-story house. In

another, he rode a bicycle into a canal. In a third, he simply wept, with grief actual or staged, for the camera.

There's something half-comedic, half-Romantic about all of this: part Buster Keaton, part Shelley and Keats. And the concluding element in his last project, "In Search of the Miraculous," began on a larky-heroic note when, on a bright June day in 1975, he set sail alone from Cape Cod in a 12-foot boat, headed for England. The boat was recovered nearly a year later, but the artist was never seen again.

Three years earlier, Helene Winer, co-founder of Metro Pictures, had given Mr. Ader his first American show in a gallery at Pomona College in California, and now she brings her association with him full circle. There isn't much work: a video compilation, the photographic series, a few recreated installations. But there's the rock-star-style dying-young myth — a continuing performance, you might say — and it floods and fills everything.

HOLLAND COTTER

Anna and Bernhard Blume

'Scenes From a Photo-Novel'

Peter Freeman

140 Grand Street, SoHo

Through July 22

Even within the genre of strange photography — if there were such a thing — Anna and Bernhard Blume's portfolio would be unusual. Theatrical rather than cinematic, odd rather than cool (which describes most staged photography in recent years), the large-scale black-and-white photographs in "Scenes From a Photo-Novel" at Peter Freeman are very much of an era: Most were made in the 1980s. This is the couple's first show in New York since exhibiting at the Museum of Modern Art in 1989.

The Blumes (Mr. Blume died in 2011) studied at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in the 1960s, when performance was entering the art conversation, and for these

photographs they staged different tableau that dramatized and lampooned German middle-class married couples. Some of the jokes are lost in translation, like “Küchenkoller” (1985), a series of photographs with Ms. Blume amid a hailstorm of potatoes that seem to take on a life of their own. (The title plays on the idea of the “kitchen frenzy” of the housewife, but also the “prison frenzy” of inmates.) Throughout the works, however, gestures and expressions translate, suggesting a postmodern slapstick with shades of feminism, psychoanalytic theory and the absurdist nihilism of writers like Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard or Elfriede Jelinek.

The Blumes’ work is decidedly old school (or dated; take your pick). Nonetheless, the images skillfully exploit photography’s ability to freeze time to create a photo narrative. In a world ruled by moving images — YouTube, GIFs, videos on social media — this makes the work here feel, if not fashionable, strangely effective.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

‘I Talk With the Spirits’

Marianne Boesky

509 and 507 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 12

“I Talk With the Spirits,” an exceptionally resonant show organized by the artist and writer Chris Wiley at Marianne Boesky, brings together works by three artists that in diverse ways evoke transcendental possibilities.

Optically captivating paintings by the Los Angeles artist Lee Mullican (1919-1998) consist of fields of fine, short lines layered over irregular grids and glyphic forms suggesting cosmic energies animating physical reality. The exhibition also presents a set of wonderful small terra-cotta sculptures that Mr. Mullican made in 1960: emblematic figures formed from rolls and balls of clay lying flat on the pedestal. They look as if they were made for talismanic purposes by an unknown people centuries ago.

Thornton Dial (1928-2016) was a self-taught Alabama artist whose paintings and sculptures composed from all kinds of found materials embody a kind of homespun totemism. Most impressive are two thronelike seats from the mid-1990s. “Testing Chair (Remembering Bessie Harvey)” is mostly made of tree roots painted white. “Foundation of the World (A Dream of My Mother)” is an assemblage of steel rods, rope, carpet, burlap and other materials. Both have a fantastic, mystical vibe.

Jay Heikes (born 1975), who lives in Minneapolis, is a skeptical postmodernist whose sculptures resemble objects unearthed by archaeologists. Including masklike constructions called “spirit animals” and rusted kettles that an ancient alchemist might have used, his creations may be seen as agnostic parodies of authentic artifacts. Yet despite being fictional contrivances, they exude poetic effects, as if a spiritual persona in the artist were striving to overcome his secularist prejudices.

KEN JOHNSON

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