

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

LOWER EAST SIDE

Sascha Braunig

Through April 16, François Ghebaly, 391 Grand Street, Manhattan; 646-559-9400, ghebaly.com. Through April 21, Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, Manhattan; 917-388-2464, magentaplains.com.



Sascha Braunig's "Fountain" (2021), oil on linen over panel. Credit Sascha Braunig and François Ghebaly; Dario Lasagni

In her latest Neo-Surrealist paintings, Sascha Braunig has gained in narrative complexity what she has lost in formal punch. It is a worthy trade-off — although I miss the power of some of her earlier works, especially the mysterious, Magrittean heads shrouded in exquisite, glowing trompe-l'oeil patterns that matched the background. These may have reached their culmination in the artist's shows at Foxy Production, her former New York gallery, in 2015, and MoMA/P.S. 1 in 2017.

In the years since, Braunig's work has increasingly focused on the human body, or at least on a highly attenuated headless intimation thereof, cryptically defined by narrow tubular lines both smooth and thorny. In ambitious shows of new paintings and related studies at Magenta Plains and François

Ghebaly, two galleries in the Lower East Side, she has pushed more deeply into a slightly ominous feminist territory, one where suggestions of performance, dressmaking and ambiguous power dynamics circle one another.

Expanses of hanging fabric, in which Braunig's love of color and light are especially strong, suggest stage curtains, but have been cut open and sharply gathered, usually by the wiry figures, to suggest both gowns and hourglasses. This occurs most clearly in a painting at Magenta Plains, where a yellow curtain is transformed into a gown by an attenuated figure of red lines which seems more puppet master than mannequin. The painting's title, like the show's, is "Lay Figure." Aptly enough, this is the term for wood dolls with adjustable limbs that figurative artists use as substitutes for living models.

ROBERTA SMITH