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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in May

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CHELSEA

Aria Dean



Installation view of “Figuer Sucia,” Aria Dean’s exhibition at Greene Naftali. On the foreground is “FIGURE A, Friesian Mare,” a glossy, crumpled gray lump on a shipping palette. via Aria Dean and Greene Naftali, New York; Photo by Zeshan Ahmed

The young artist and theorist Aria Dean is known for essays connecting Blackness, objecthood and digital culture. (Her selected writings, “Bad Infinity,” debuts this summer.) This is good to remember, since from the moment you pass through the bubble-gum pink saloon doors at Greene Naftali — a deadpan work titled “Pink Saloon Doors” — the polished sculptures and digital prints on view seem sparse and cryptic, defiantly superficial. Something’s omitted. This show follows from Dean’s dynamic thinking (or, less generously, illustrates points she’s made on the page) regarding the ease with which lo-fi images circulate, although the uninitiated can also appreciate her chilly, cynical take on commercial art.

The sculpture “FIGURE A, Friesian Mare,” a glossy, crumpled gray lump on a shipping palette, evokes a kind of trashed Minimalist cube or compacted equestrian statue, unsubtly twisting the connection between stark formalism and the viewer’s body. The implications of treating living things as commodities are brutal.

The other four works on view are luxuriously tall dye sublimation prints on aluminum, three or four panels each, depicting ... what? From a distance, blurs and blotches, a sky, shapes whipping by at high speed, but blown up and zoomed in to such a degree that they’re basically abstract, flecked with stray pixels. In fact, Dean’s project could be summarized as exploring the violence abstraction causes, or makes possible. The taciturn slickness of this show provokes an uncomfortable reaction: Is there no feeling here? No pain? No humanity? *TRAVIS DIEHL*