

ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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Eliza Douglas and Anne Imhof

The German artist Anne Imhof created the most-talked-about artwork of this year's Venice Biennale: "Faust," an elaborate installation-performance piece that kitted out the German Pavilion with caged Doberman pinschers, a troupe of youthful, runway-ready performers and a raised glass-and-steel floor that placed viewers above the action. It won the top prize, the Golden Lion, and from afar seemed to capitalize on mixed signals concerning corporate architecture, voyeurism, gender fluidity, feminist autonomy and Germany's Nazi past. Artforum magazine called it "a work of supremely entitled cool."

One of the star performers in "Faust" was the American artist Eliza Douglas, who is Ms. Imhof's partner and her frequent painting collaborator, as evidenced by their joint New York gallery debut at Galerie Buchholz. Crowded with paintings they have made together and separately, their show communicates a smart, ambiguous, mostly unsatisfying polish at closer range.

There's nothing new here, although everything is extremely well done. Ms. Imhof's main efforts are shiny acrylic monochromes (black, white or turquoise) on aluminum with impulsive flurries of scratches — variants of zombie formalism that imply vandalism. "Baby, Baby" is also hers: a standard gestural abstraction centered on an octopus with an open mouth and a touch of Francis Bacon teeth. In the pair's collaborative canvases, their signatures form large, semi-legible tangles — variously fragmented, magnified and reversed, in snappy black on white. Consistent with their comment on the authorial aura, the works are made by assistants, and they veer close to the black-and-white irreverence of ones by Christopher Wool and Albert Oehlen, although those painters may also be intended targets.

In addition, Ms. Douglas exhibits solitary efforts: suitably modish, performative canvases in which hyper-realistic hands and feet are connected by improvised, abstract lines. The loose brushwork and the octopus return in a two-panel collaboration that is obviously titled “A Hundred Thousand Dollars.” The artists’ signatures recur in works featuring Warholesque arrangements of images of Ms. Douglas. Doubts about these pieces can elicit another one: But maybe that’s the point? For the time being, and especially when they’re all ganged together as they are here, that may be enough.