

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

Art in America



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not by rejecting spectacle capitalism but by maximizing the visual pleasures that cutting-edge high-resolution screens can provide. Tabor Robak's overloaded field of colorful 3D blobs and Jacolby Satterwhite's baroque universe populated by voguing dancers—both at Barclays Center—made the surrounding ads feel limited and impoverished by their adherence to branding conventions.

Still, there's only so much of a break that a fleeting artwork can provide. While pausing the normal flow of advertisements, "Commercial Break" effectively offered a different sort of promotional platform, for the artists themselves. It was easy to miss the works in situ, but dramatic still images of them standing out against their contexts circulated on social media, tapping into the mythic indicator of success: having one's name in lights.

—William S. Smith



Jordan Kasey:
Poolside, 2017, oil on
canvas, 77½ by 108
inches; at Nicelle
Beauchene.

JORDAN KASEY

Nicelle Beauchene

In the fraught present, the endurance and perceived stability of past traditions can hold a sirenlike allure. The six excellent paintings in Jordan Kasey's first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene (all 2017) convey a sense of surreal timelessness. The show's title, "Exoplanet," feels appropriate considering that the subjects portrayed in the paintings mimic earthlings but inhabit a neon-tinged alien world. Larger-than-life-size bodies that appear fashioned from clay push against the edges of the canvases. Built up in thick swaths of oil paint, the anonymous figures project an imposing air, largely due to the stony, carved-out quality of their features and the paintings' confident scales (the smallest work is fifty-four inches square).

Four of the six paintings portray solitary subjects engaged in everyday tasks, such as sitting down to a meal (*At the Table*) or lolling on the lawn (*Backyard at Night*). The single multi-figure piece, *Poolside*, demonstrates many of the artist's formal techniques. The claustrophobic scene is filled with burly bodies. A narrow strip of unshaded blue represents a pool and serves as the only indication

of a wider space. Composed with a limited red-and-pink palette, the limbs of the huddled group of swimmers have a weighty and heavily modeled presence. The upper bodies of two figures, one of whom sits on a bright yellow bench while the other stands behind it, are cut out of the frame. Two other swimmers sit on the ground, on either side of the painting. The one on the right has her back to us, while the one on the left faces the viewer, reaching out to absentmindedly graze the gray-tiled ground—a subtle, inscrutable gesture that serves as the painting's focal point, the only hint of movement in a scene of sculptural stillness. Kasey adroitly contrasts intimacy with alienation throughout the paintings. This crowded example seems to bring the figures very close to us, without ever letting us in.

Practicing Piano depicts a gray figure—bent over, lips nearly kissing the keyboard—passionately playing the instrument. The painting is almost overwhelmingly personal. Yet everything about the figure remains ambiguous. Kasey's oneiric realism excludes signifiers for gender, race, and class, and any glimpses of individual identity. The inky black palette she used to render a figure sitting on the fluorescent green grass in *Backyard at Night* seems to impart little about race, but instead underscores the nondescript nocturnal scene's melancholic or reflective mood.

Kasey, who was born in 1985 and lives in New York, engages classical history in her work; the best formal historical parallel may be found in Picasso's interwar Classicist Period. The squad in *Poolside* could be descendants of the Pygmalion-esque women who inhabit Picasso's *The Source* and *Two Bathers* (both 1921). Picasso's classicizing aesthetic was part of a broader "return to order" in the wake of World War I, when many artists abandoned the extremes of the avant-garde in favor of seemingly timeless, traditional forms. In the 1920s, this shift provided the foundations for Surrealism, a revolt against rationalism and societal rules. Kasey's static, alien view of the present, where scenes of intimacy are opaque and unsettling, is a welcome complication of returning and order, past and present, backward and forward.

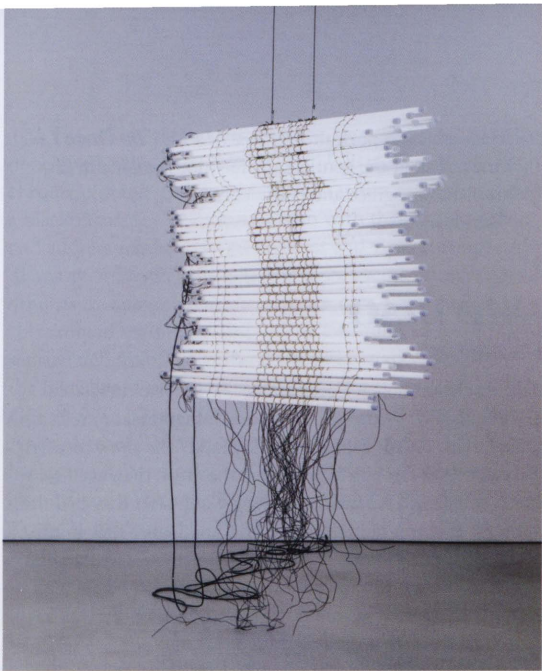
—Julia Wolkoff

MONICA BONVICINI

Mitchell-Innes & Nash

For this exhibition, the Italian-born, Berlin-based artist Monica Bonvicini bisected Mitchell Innes & Nash's main space with a temporary wall supported by two small, dildolike "sculptures" in Murano glass resting on the floor. The installation, *Structural Psychodrama #2* (2017), succinctly encapsulated the central theme of her work over the last twenty years: the imbrication of sex and architecture through relationships between the body and its shelters, barriers, props, and frames. As Bonvicini put it in a 2004 interview, "You have something under your belt and something over your head. And you need both."

The central wall, left conspicuously bare, served primarily as an obstruction, blocking the viewer's movement through the space as well as the sightlines between the exhibition's other works. At first, I didn't recognize it as an artwork at all: fitted seamlessly between the building's existing structural columns, the pristine white wall running down the middle of the gallery seemed to suggest an ill-



conceived interior renovation—irritating, but not out of place—until I glanced at the floor and noticed the glass phalluses peeking out underneath. This subtle architectural intervention hints at the influence of Bonvicini's former CalArts professor Michael Asher, whom she has often cited as her most significant mentor, but here institutional critique is crossed with a Surrealist-style sight gag. *Structural Psychodrama* takes up the association of architecture and construction with male virility—a frequently recurring subject of Bonvicini's work—and makes it both comically literal (a wall built atop a foundation of dicks is an apt metaphor for much of the modernist architectural canon) and antagonistic (dildos are dicks that can be claimed by women).

Several works exploring similar territory were arranged on either side of the installation. One of the gallery's permanent walls was dominated by what appeared to be a large, bland abstract painting recalling a Rorschach test (*Mountain Town 2015, 2017*); as it turns out, it depicts the charred skeleton of a California house destroyed by a wildfire. Straddling the adjacent corner was a sculpture made of black leather belts knotted together to form two linked, testicular spheres (*Belts Ball [double ball], 2017*). On the other side of the wall, a neon light sculpture framed by aluminum scaffolding (*No More #1, 2016*) bore the insistently ambiguous phrase NO MORE MASTURBATION, alternately suggesting a repressive injunction, a rallying cry for the undersexed, and, as the press release would have it, an inquiry into the role of productivity in sexual pleasure under capitalism (admittedly, I find this last interpretation a little tenuous). Another antagonistic light sculpture, *Bent and Winded* (2017), hung from the ceiling, composed of a tangle of LED lights so aggressively bright that it was virtually impossible to look at directly for more than a few seconds at a time. Echoing the painting on the opposite side of the gallery was a black-and-white photo-based mural (*Untitled [Two Men Building a Wall], 2017*) depicting two construction workers viewed from the back as they erect a brick wall in some generically gritty urban enclave, left purposefully unidentifiable.

When Bonvicini began working in the 1990s, her frank engagement with fetishism and BDSM—particularly as a female artist—carried a far more transgressive charge than it does today. What I found most unsettling in this show wasn't the leather, cocks, and chains, but the mural, with its anonymizing gaze at day laborers dwarfed by layers of brick. Many of Bonvicini's most notorious works have explored a libidinal investment in construction: the video installation *Wallfuckin'* (1995) features a nude woman grinding against the edge of a wall; for *What Does Your Wife/Girlfriend Think of Your Rough and Dry Hands* (1999), she surveyed construction workers with questions about the erotics of their profession. But now when I think of a man building a big, beautiful wall, I am not aroused, but terrified.

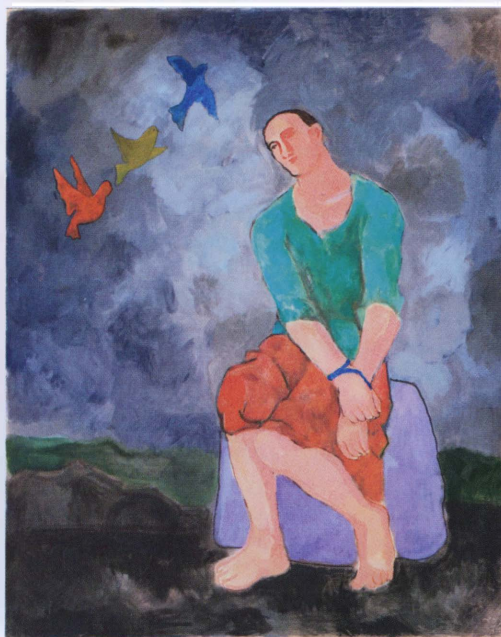
—Rachel Wetzler

Monica Bonvicini:
Bent and Winded,
2017, LED light
tubes, wire, and
steel, 91 by 64 by 10
inches; at Mitchell-
Innes & Nash.

SANDRO CHIA

Marc Straus

For his first exhibition of paintings in New York in nearly a decade, Italian artist Sandro Chia offered a rather overt reflection on his life, albeit one delivered in the painterly and metaphorical terms for which he is known. Now seventy, Chia was once a bad boy of the Transavanguardia, which included like-minded compatriots such as Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Luigi Ontani, and Carlo Maria Mariani and polarized the international art world of the late 1970s and '80s. Transavanguardia not only reintroduced figurative painting into the predominantly Minimalist and Conceptual scene of the period, but proposed devices like allegory and mythology as valid strategies in contemporary art discourse, much to the chagrin of the art-world establishment at the time. For better or worse, the group helped instigate the art-market boom of subsequent years.



Sandro Chia: *The Prisoner's Dream*,
2017, oil on canvas,
63¾ by 51 inches; at
Marc Straus.