

TIBOR DE NAGY

15 Rivington St New York NY 10002
212 262 5050 info@tibordenagy.com
tibordenagy.com

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Trevor Winkfield Brings Optical Heat to His Latest Gallery Show

By ROBERTA SMITH MARCH 23, 2018



Trevor Winkfield's "The First Dance" (2017).

Born in Britain in 1944, Trevor Winkfield has lived in New York since 1969 and exhibited here almost as long. For decades, he has cultivated a style of Formalist Pop Surrealism that balances between fine and commercial art. His precedents include the proto-Pop paintings of Gerald Murphy; Paul Outerbridge's advertising photography; and Picabia's mechanical portraits which Mr. Winkfield might be said to have fleshed out.

Mr. Winkfield's paintings are built to always look new — both fresh and unfamiliar. Their complex palette of brilliant, compelling colors (seldom straight from the tube), their smooth surfaces and their locked-in compositions push everything to the brink of abstraction. He keeps the optical heat on by using bright yellows — when he wants to lighten up — and virtually banning white.



Mr. Winkfield's "St. George and the Dragon," from 2017.

But his totemic figures built from half-recognizable insignia and symbols pulse with narrative implication, relationships and innuendo. This is especially the case in "Saints, Dancers and Acrobats," a group of compact yet airy canvases from the last five years that form one of Mr. Winkfield's best shows. The prevailing composition here is of two figure-like totems facing forward as if standing at attention. In "Signals," one totem seems ready to spin, while the other has open triangles that evoke arms akimbo. It brings to mind "Signals," Merce Cunningham's landmark dance from 1970.

Mr. Winkfield's cryptic symbols and hyped-up color is itself a precedent for the flat representational styles of younger painters like Caitlin Keogh, Derrick Adams and Orion Martin. It's great to see Mr. Winkfield's work on the youth-oriented Lower East Side, at Tibor de Nagy, a gallery that has just moved here, after a long life uptown.