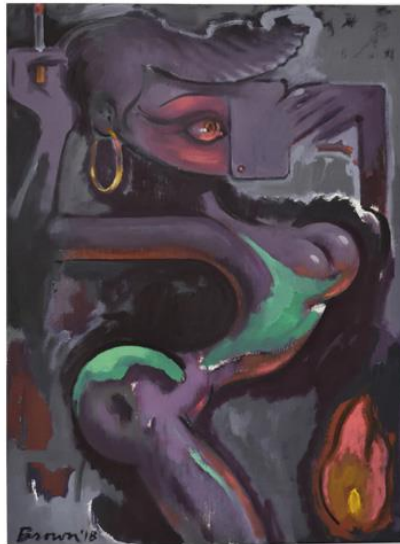


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Delia Brown

by MARTHA SCHWENDENER

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Pablo Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger" (1907), a painting depicting prostitutes on a notorious street in Barcelona, has served as both a cornerstone of modern art and Exhibit A in arguments about women being objectified and exploited in Western art. But what happens when women turn the lens on themselves, posting similarly suggestive or sexualized images on social media? Delia Brown uses this idea as a springboard for "Demoiselles d'Instagram" at Tibor de Nagy.

Several paintings here feature women taking “gym selfies,” a subgenre of Instagram self-portraiture. Cute harp seals are neatly woven into the compositions, suggesting the wild disparities of social media feeds, and one painting roughly mimics the composition of Picasso’s “Demoiselles,” with its shifting, jarring perspectives and distorted figures. Ms. Brown’s titles, made up wholly or partly of emojis, are a nice touch, too.

Ms. Brown’s acrid palette and stylized, often grotesque figures signal a departure from her earlier, more sedate realism. In the same way Picasso cribbed from African sculpture to almost-invent Cubism in his “Demoiselles” (full-blown Cubism came a year later) Ms. Brown’s ladies echo the exaggerated femininity of Japanese anime; Lisa Yuskavage’s paintings; Dana Schutz’s reduxes of Willem de Kooning’s Cubist-inspired reduxes of Picasso; the graffiti aesthetic of Kenny Scharf; and the brilliantly weird figurative paintings of 20th-century outliers like late-Francis Picabia and Leonor Fini.

In the end, however, women representing themselves via social media do not fare better here than they did in Picasso’s misogynist universe. (And while competent and often clever, Ms. Brown’s exhibition doesn’t constitute a comparable, seismic shift in the history of painting.) Society and the beauty industry’s demands may shape these representations, but rather than “victims” of sexist body culture, the “Demoiselles d’Instagram” appear to be flagrant perpetrators.