

on either side of a bearded Rastafarian man carrying a small bag—the cops, for their part, have truncheons at the ready. Behind this trio, another officer appears to be contorted in a dance move, while other figures look on. Forrester doesn't focus on facial expressions, so the human relationships in his work are described entirely through posture and gesture; in spite of the simple expressionism that defines *NIGHT HUNTERS*—and the artist's work in general—there is an ambiguity to both elements that prevents the work from becoming overly didactic, and which has allowed its message to be heard again.

—Michael Wilson

## Michele Abeles

47 CANAL

What's black and white and red all over? Such a question, of course, is a riddle whose punch line could be “a sunburned zebra” or “a newspaper.” Michele Abeles nods to this joke in the announcement for her recent exhibition at 47 Canal: The word *zebra*, her show's title, runs vertically down an iPhone screenshot of the *New York Times*'s home page. The riddle's obsolescence—obsolete because it suggests that, in this attention-dry digital era, newspapers might be black-and-white or read to completion—is a distillation of the themes that ran through the exhibition.

In the show were nine prints (all works 2016), each titled with a four-digit number that might simply track inventory—appropriate, given the photographs document points of sale at various clothing retailers in New York. Most works center on hands: In *5040*, manicured fingers, pinky outstretched just so, gracefully tug loose a receipt, the gesture perfectly framed by a clunky register apparatus: a computer, credit-card readers. A tag is snipped from a purse in *5762*—on it is a bar code, which would be an apt update to the titular riddle. A bangled arm reaches to rip a receipt from an old dust-gray printer in *5641*. The depicted hands are gendered, disarticulated from their bodies, and as such they summon the Surrealist fetish. They are sited at the intersection of desire and



Michele Abeles, *5641*, 2016, inkjet print, 42 × 29½".

the technologies that structure social and economic engagement, albeit those that are quickly becoming outdated. The consumer realm is increasingly being moved online; even in physical space—take, for example, Amazon Go's “just walk out technology”—developments ward against any human interaction at all.

The works appear to be methodologically in keeping with Abeles's 2009–11 series “Re:Re:Re:Re:Re:”: photographs of in-studio arrangements of props, Plexiglas, and colored gels that together produce the flattened visual effect of having been adapted in postproduction. The works in “Zebra” share the same bold, fractured quality. And it is hard to discern, as it was with the 2011 works, that they were produced entirely in camera. But unlike the older works, the new images were not simply captured directly, and they aren't exactly untouched. The

artist downloaded her snaps to a tablet; then smeared paint and hand lotion, spat, or dripped water on the device's surface; and finally rephotographed the image as it appeared on the screen, now distorted by moiré, glare, and various liquid textures. Each blemish indexes a gesture, serving as a reminder that the body is all over the hard-shell sheen of our technologies. We spread contaminants every time we swipe, pinch, or drag, performing the reduced choreography that makes up so much contemporary labor.

“Zebra” also featured two sculptural works, inexplicably titled *Kumamoto* (a Japanese city) and *Cannonau* (a type of wine grape), respectively. These also pit the corrupted against the pure: Recombined and distorted fragments of Abeles's earlier photos—she describes them as “digital composites”—are reproduced alongside a printed pattern of sterile-white ceramic tiles, which are square, like empty pixels. A blurry black spiral sits atop each print, evoking the vortices of hypnosis or time travel or infinity. It was hard to square these works with the rest of the show. The artist seemingly appropriated the intense spiral graphic for the sake of foreclosure—to keep the viewer out, or to lead her astray. Yet if Abeles means to posit that the spectator is extraneous—an outdated relic of our increasingly automated, seamlessly bar-coded, “just walk out” economy—she does not elide her audience completely. Abeles reminds us of human traces—whether an odd sculptural support or an errant dribble of spit.

—Annie Godfrey Larmont

## Ena Swansea

ALBERTZ BENDA GALLERY

A visitor once asked me how long it takes a new arrival to become a New Yorker. My considered response: You are a New Yorker when you start to miss the “real” New York, the one you knew when the city was still fresh to you and hadn't yet been replaced by . . . whatever it is that the next wave of arrivals brought with them. By that standard, I might have to call myself an inhabitant of the city that Ena Swansea evokes in her most recent paintings. It's recognizably New York, but not as I see it when I walk its streets these days. Swansea's New York is wrapped up in a decayed Romanticism that's hardly been felt in these parts since the 1980s, and this despite the fact that her imagery discreetly incorporates contemporary details, for instance the signage for a fast-food chain that didn't exist back then (*shake shack in the summer*, 2015). More often, her paintings focus on decontextualized nature—details that don't relate to any specific time period: a distant vista from the waterfront (*view from the sex pier*, 2016) or trees with some brownstones peeking through in the background (*snow on 16th street*, 2015).

Strangely, though, the New York that is the main setting for most of the works in Swansea's recent show doesn't look that different from her North Carolina hometown in *snow in charlotte*, 2016, the one painting

Ena Swansea, *Tiny Plastic Hands*, 2016, oil on graphite on linen, 20 × 30".

