

Flash Art

Reviews

Janiva Ellis 47 Canal / New York

by Precious Okoyomon

December 11, 2019



Janiva Ellis, "Tip Drill." Exhibition at 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York.

A body is torn away from itself and reformed around a hard fist. Light bounces off the eye of the patron saint, a zoomorphic angel singing into the space time of indestructible blackness . Perspective shifts around a wave in a fit of fantasy, it is modular and devilish. Janiva Ellis's show at 47 Canal is a lost and otherworldly paradise not for people for the twisted fallen angels of desire. Alienation, divorce, severance. She's working at the limits of language and of image-making, dealing with the tireless purgatory of being flesh, but I don't know if that's adequate to what the paintings are actually doing. I use the word doing because I don't think these paintings are saying anything, insofar as I think they are operating, effecting, working. In a talk with Sadiya Hartman at the Hammer Museum the artist Arthur Jafa reminds me "Saying is not the only way to make meaning in this world, if you have a photograph or a video or something like that it is precisely not saying. a picture is not saying. but it is still making assertions about the world ." These are haunting images and their capacity to stump us is I think a dislocation of the painter's own feeling of being stumped by the deracinating interdiction of anti-blackness and its gratuitous violence being reverted onto her

viewers. This kind of transgression is critical. It doesn't reinscribe violence or rehearse it in painting, dangerously forcing us to see it again, but instead reproduces the feeling of that violence going unseen as it almost always does, remaining invisible or incommunicable entirely. Rage flashing floating through twisting into a new landscape of dislocation free flowing fizzy resistance rebirth. Janiva has reconstructed the thinking of black feeling into a new mythology where one falls into playful painstaking grace.