

## JANIVA ELLIS: YOUNG ARTISTS 2018

ART | JAN 2018 | BY KAT HERRIMAN



“There is so much room for playfulness with the immediacy of painting,” says artist Janiva Ellis of her current medium of choice. “The inventions that happen in the pursuit of resolving a composition are such a joyful part of the process. It’s also a medium that naturally lends itself to this task of talking about structures of acceptance and our inclination to clumsily reduce one another as different or same.”

At “Lick Shot,” Ellis’ celebrated 2017 solo debut at 47 Canal, the jumbled figures, backgrounds and narratives defied categorization as if in a constant state of turmoil, perhaps even pain. “Trauma is defined differently by everyone,” the artist notes when asked about the characters’ anguish. “The trauma I’m communicating is the product of doubt, dismissal and assumption. One that largely goes unnoticed. One that, for the doubtful, will barely, if ever, be acknowledged. Evidence of physical pain is often times a necessary receipt for the doubtful. To me, my images aren’t any more violent than many everyday interactions. Any more anguished than they are obliged. The unrest in my work represents a release, a shared sardonic moment of tension and amusement.”

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Familiar faces from mainstream cartoons serve as an entrypoint for decoding Ellis' contentious compositions. "Pairing the communicative immediacy of cartoons with the urgency of gesture can spawn a tense formula in art that activates the environment in which the characters engage," the artist says. "Cartoons reference our introduction to media and how that influences our perception. Tactics of categorizing as a means of self preservation begin with our earliest exposures to media. Upon introduction, impressions are accepted as absolute until they are skewered by contradicting realities. This introduction of doubt is instrumental to our perception of foreign experiences." This spring, Ellis will participate in the New Museum Triennial offering New Yorkers another opportunity to join the artist in her playful dismantling, confronting and obscuring of the truth.