

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

‘Samaritans,’ an evocative show by 16 artists; Bonnie Collura’s ‘princes’; Carol Rama’s arresting watercolors; and Rachelle Mozman Solano’s takes on Gauguin.

Feb. 12, 2019

‘Samaritans’

Through March 3. Galerie Eva Presenhuber, 39 Great Jones Street, Manhattan; 212-931-0711, presenhuber.com.

An orange cat turns its mask-like face to the viewer in Joan Brown’s 1985 painting “The Golden Age: The Jaguar and the Tapir,” one of the stars of “Samaritans,” an exceptionally dense and evocative 16-artist show organized by the writer and curator Dan Nadel at Galerie Eva Presenhuber. The jaguar’s markings are a fanciful mix of wavy lines and amoeba-like shapes, and the animal stares with pale, yellow-green eyes, their pupils fine as apple seeds.

The contrast between the tapir’s impastoed gray-black fur and the painting’s flat green background is jarring, as are four red rectangles, marked with pre-Columbian-style figures, that could represent windows, frescoes or tapestries. You don’t quite know where you’re standing, or what the rules are. But the work is not exactly threatening, either. It’s just a reminder that art, like the unconscious or the spirit world, has its own nonliteral reality.

Two plaster casts by Sarah Peters, sensitive classical-white busts with tight crowns of wavy Assyrian hair; a series of heavily worked colored-pencil drawings by Steve DiBenedetto; and the three-eyed smoker in Jason Fox’s large green painting “Jekyll” are all eerie transformations of the human figure. An upholstered wooden monolith by Joe Bradley, like a cross between a coffin and a phone booth for mediums, is a polite but firm reminder of the eerie transformation awaiting us all.

Three women in blue scrubs move a gurney through a mod-looking hospital in Gary Panter’s acrylic “Nurses of Gamma.” It’s not clear whether they’re running from the green monster hailing them with an upraised tentacle or merely looking back in acknowledgment. Painted with swirling strokes of kelly green over olive, the creature may be an imaginary boogie man, the unformed libido or a monstrous self we can’t acknowledge — but all it’s really doing is saying hello.

WILL HEINRICH
