



SASCHA BRAUNIG

MAGENTA PLAINS

Sascha Braunig holds a BFA from The Cooper Union and an MFA in painting from Yale University. Braunig was awarded a studio residency from the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program in 2016–2017, a Pollock-Krasner Foundation award in 2016, and a Macdowell Fellowship in 2013. Selected solo exhibitions include *The Crease*, Office Baroque, Brussels, BE (2018); *Bad Latch*, Atlanta Contemporary, GA (2017); *Free Peel*, Foxy Production, New York, NY (2017); *Shivers*, MoMA PS1, New York, NY (2016); and *Torsion*, Kunsthall Stavanger, NO (2015). Institutional group exhibitions include: *Manif d'Art* - Quebec City Biennial, CA (2022); *An Assembly of Shapes*, Oakville Galleries, Ontario, CA; PMA Biennial, Portland Museum of Art, ME (2018); *Dreamers Awake*, White Cube, London (2017); NGV Triennial, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, AU (2017); *The Trick Brain*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, LB (2017); *Stranger*, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, OH (2016); and *Surround Audience: New Museum Triennial*, New York, NY (2015). Her forthcoming solo museum exhibition, *Lay Figure*, will be held at Oakville Galleries, Ontario, CA.

Born in 1983, Qualicum Beach, Canada
Lives and works in Portland, ME

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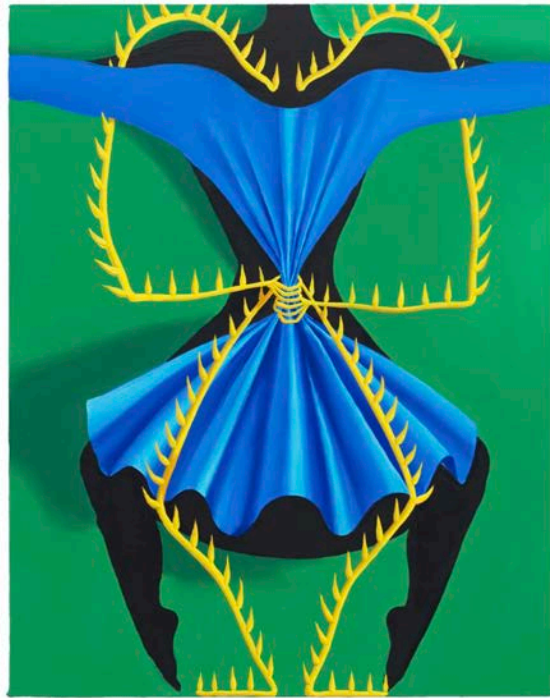
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The New Yorker

8 April 2022

THE NEW YORKER

ART

Sascha Braunig

Art work by Sascha Braunig / Courtesy the artist / Magenta Plains

A lay figure is an articulated mannequin used by artists in lieu of live models. For the American painter **Sascha Braunig**, whose primary subject is the female figure as a metaphysical category, rather than as an entity of flesh and blood, the depersonalized studio tool is a rich symbol—one whose name she borrows to title her two-part exhibition at Magenta Plains and François Ghebaly, on view through April 16. Cropped torsos with the dramatic proportions of a cinched hourglass occupy an electric dreamscape, in canvases that reference a host of works by artists who've similarly toyed with images of exaggerated femininity (the corseted forms of Christina Ramberg, the patterned silhouettes of the Chicago Imagist Suellen Rocca) in kindred strains of Pop surrealism. Braunig's five-foot-tall painting "Meret" might refer to Meret Oppenheim, who also deployed a kind of satirical fetishism in her work; it portrays a leather-gloved hand adjusting a slinky blue net, while plaited laces in black and red descend below it in endless vertical rows. Elsewhere, thorny scaffolding, taut laces, and skeleton hands exact wasp-waisted obedience from lasers, drinking straws, and dresses (as seen in "Study for Clutches 1," above), proof that the artist is nowhere close to exhausting the anatomical absurdity of her theme.

— *Johanna Fateman*

April 2022


 The logo for Brooklyn Rail, featuring a stylized 'B' icon followed by the words 'BROOKLYN RAIL' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

ArtSeen

Sascha Braunig: *Lay Figure*

By Osman Can Yerebakan



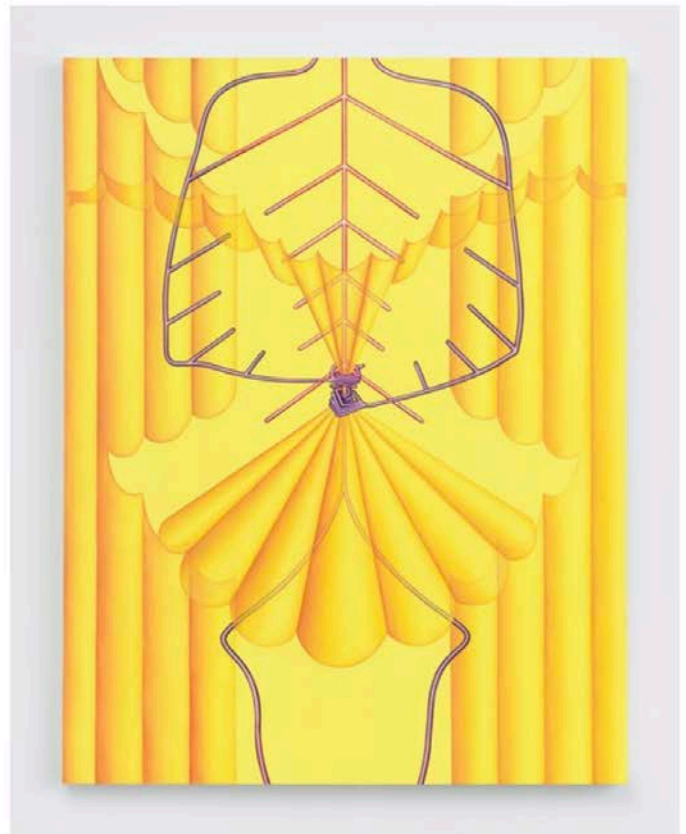
Sascha Braunig, *Study for "Medusa"*, 2021. Oil on linen over panel, 14 x 11 1/4 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains, New York.

During a recent trip to New York Academy of Art, I was reminded of *écorché*, the meticulous art of rendering human figures stripped of flesh, bare to the body's stringy muscles and lean bones. A mastering of *écorché*, as my companion told me, during the times of the old masters was the foray into capturing the essence of the human likeness on canvas or in bronze. Echoing the statuesque nooks of the body's innards and attributing to paint or stone a similar breath of life demonstrated utmost artistry.

In the contemporary order, mirroring the human physique is merely an artistic ambition; however, the body that envelops the carnal desire beneath the skin and contains the beat of a restless heart is still a territory to explore. Sascha Braunig's new suite of corporal paintings are molecular and grandiose, both openings and veilings of the anatomy, not only as a yearning skin and pulsating heart, but also as a den of celestial chances. Dotting the walls of Magenta Plains and François Ghebaly, a few blocks apart on the Lower East Side, are paintings of spines as pillars of bodily temples, each made with a frivolous lightness while slicing the linen surface with a quirky determinism.

Gently folded like lush theater curtains or heart-wrenching love letters, the spines revel in a statuesque elegance, an alluring mystery of the impending, as well as the vagueness of their intentions. Perhaps this last trait—the in-betweenness of Braunig’s anti-human bodies—makes her paintings challenging to look away from. Each backbone is forcefully grabbed by hands with brutal determination, clutched like a life-saving arm or a long-missed lover. The grips, however, seem nothing like a caress, but more like products of an alien familiarity with their brittle thinness and sly approaches. Challenging the hands’ drained appearances are their evident power, so strong that each spine is tightly squeezed to its last breath, such as in *Study for Clutches 1* (2020) or *Study for Fountain* (2021), both on view at Magenta Plains. In the combat between weightlessness and force, the winner is left ambiguous: are the hands guardians of affably soft columns or do they clutch the helpless anchors to destroy? Searching for an answer is futile, and settling for humor is suggested.

Braunig’s main medium is her wit, a wildly necessary matter, in fact, to handle the body as a subject matter. Christina Ramberg and Kiki Kogelnik, as the shows’ joint press release notes, are her inspirations. Additionally, I also see a dose of Judy Chicago in Braunig’s flirtation with the sexual abstract, Hilma af Klint in the paintings’ odes to a transcendental geometry, as well as Tamara de Lempicka in the artist’s construction of the body with architectural composition. The show’s titular work *Lay Figure* (2021) is a radiant yellow moment with two skinny arms gripping the backbone—or waist or spine—like a bouquet of flowers offered in asking for forgiveness. The implication of a body is elevated with two tiny legs sprouting from the bouquet. Various shades of yellow populate a background, either a theatrical set with vertical drapes or impeccably cut slices of a glutinous cake.



Sascha Braunig, *Lay Figure*, 2021. Oil on linen over panel, 54 x 42 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains, New York.

2nd Study for Lay Figure (2020) also claims a yellow setting, paired with a blackish sky that bleeds into the lower, sunny half in an amber haze. The spine is spectral, a transparent veil in front of the golden horizon. Two sets of arms grab the see-through cloth with an unforgiving will while their bony hands form geometric cubes around the slim corsage. The limbs' light red skin is repeated in two vertical lines, outlining a waist that contains the clutched veil. The stage is a clearer set in *Medusa* (2021), at François Ghebaly, a green heavy juxtaposition of grip with pockets of air. The squeeze of the green here yields five pipes through which the outlines of the limbs arise. The self-sufficient cycle of existence and tension summarizes Braunig's commitment to wit. Two green drapes cap the left and right edge, contributing to the painting's overall showiness, almost with the brazenness of a pair of jazz hands or a blown party horn.

Braunig builds maquette versions of her figures in paper, fabric, wire, wood armature, and epoxy resin clay before reaching out to her paint brush. Whether a romantic homage to old masters or a training of the synchronization between the hand and the eye, the artist's method shines in *The Fitting* (2020). Also at Magenta Plains, this is one of the two shows' few paintings without a moment of clutching. A perfectly blue sky backdrops a barbed wire silhouette's attempt to robe itself with an airy bodysuit woven with a blood-filled vein—or simply red-colored string. The figure's hands carefully pull the tight suit on both sides, pulling its threads up from the waist towards the shoulders. Both eerie and somewhat sad, *The Fitting* is a hopeful step towards revival for our steel (anta)protagonist.



Sascha Braunig, *The Fitting*, 2020. Oil on linen over panel, 52 x 36 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains, New York.

The New York Times

31 March 2022

The New York TimesWhat to See in N.Y.C. Galleries
Right Now

LOWER EAST SIDE

Sascha Braunig

Through April 16, François Ghebaly, 391 Grand Street, Manhattan; 646-559-9400, ghebaly.com. Through April 21, Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, Manhattan; 917-388-2464, magentaplains.com.



Sascha Braunig's "Fountain" (2021), oil on linen over panel. Sascha Braunig and François Ghebaly; Dario Lasagni

In her latest Neo-Surrealist paintings, Sascha Braunig has gained in narrative complexity what she has lost in formal punch. It is a worthy trade-off — although I miss the power of some of her earlier works, especially the mysterious, Magrittean heads shrouded in exquisite, glowing trompe-l'oeil patterns that matched the background. These may have reached their culmination in the artist's shows at Foxy Production, her former New York gallery, in 2015, and MoMA/P.S. 1 in 2017.

In the years since, Braunig's work has increasingly focused on the human body, or at least on a highly attenuated headless intimation thereof, cryptically defined by narrow tubular lines both smooth and thorny. In ambitious shows of new paintings and related studies at Magenta Plains and François Ghebaly, two galleries in the Lower East Side, she has pushed more deeply into a slightly ominous feminist territory, one where suggestions of performance, dressmaking and ambiguous power dynamics circle one another.

Expanses of hanging fabric, in which Braunig's love of color and light are especially strong, suggest stage curtains, but have been cut open and sharply gathered, usually by the wiry figures, to suggest both gowns and hourglasses. This occurs most clearly in a painting at Magenta Plains, where a yellow curtain is transformed into a gown by an attenuated figure of red lines which seems more puppet master than mannequin. The painting's title, like the show's, is "Lay Figure." Aptly enough, this is the term for wood dolls with adjustable limbs that figurative artists use as substitutes for living models. **ROBERTA SMITH**

Art in America

May 2017

THE NEW YORKER

NEW YORK

SASCHA BRAUNIG

MoMA PS1 and Foxy Production

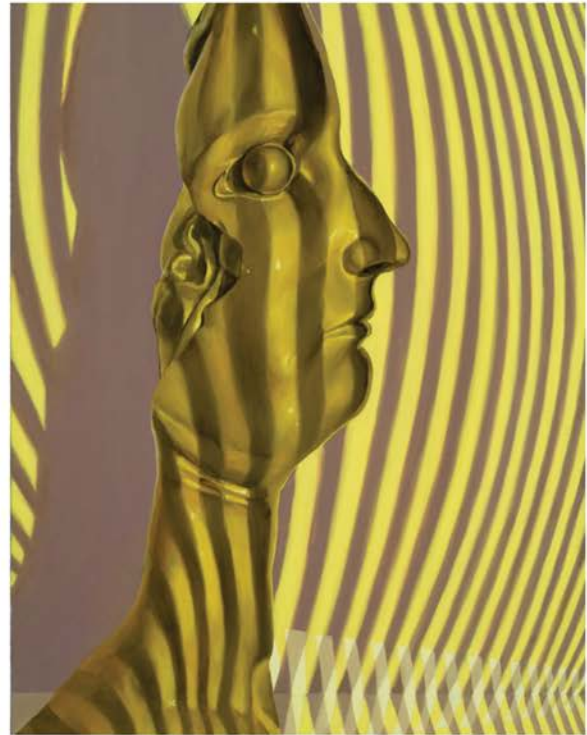
Sascha Braunig's modestly scaled oil paintings of humanoid presences upstaged many of the high-tech pieces in "Surround Audience," the 2015 triennial at the New Museum in New York. The hyperrealist canvases of the thirty-three-year-old Braunig seem to play with the look and tricks of CGI skins, but she bases them on 3D models she makes from clay (and, on rare occasions, casts in bronze). During the painting process, the Canadian-born, Maine-based artist adds a wild variety of stripes, patterns, and trompe l'oeil effects. She maintains that her cyborglike creatures are usually self-portraits.

Although Braunig's distinctive color combinations have a contemporary feel, her work engages with Surrealism, and in interviews she acknowledges Hans Bellmer as a major influence. Her painting technique echoes precisionist works by Salvador Dalí and Yves Tanguy. However, rather than infinite surreal landscapes, Braunig creates a consistently shallow space, her paintings recalling not only those of German artist Thomas Bayrle but also those of the late Italian realist Domenico Gnoli (1933–1970).

Two recent solo exhibitions afforded an opportunity to immerse oneself in Braunig's hermetic and fantastic universe. A survey at MoMA PS1, titled "Shivers" and organized by chief curator Peter Eleey, featured twenty major canvases that Braunig made between 2010 and 2015, while a show at Foxy Production brought together a selection of her newest works. One of the earliest pieces at PS1, *Sequins* (2010), presents a generic CGI-like head in a sequined casing. Another, *Goldwarp* (2010), shows what looks like a sculptural bust in profile, or a side view of a mask, the modeling evoking a hard surface. The canvas is painted throughout with stripes of gray and yellow that suggest raking sunlight.

The more recent works at PS1 were eerier and more abstract. One of the most outstanding examples, *Bridle* (2013), shows a wavy form of red, blue, and green stripes that could be a sheath covering the head and shoulders of a figure. A chain around the neck area contrasts with the sensuous bands of color and suggests that the figure is a prisoner or a captive. Such images by Braunig harbor an emotional appeal, a sense of intense anxiety, with an impact far exceeding the paintings' dimensions.

The Foxy Production show, "Free Peel," included some fifteen paintings and works on paper, many of which imply movement within the confines of Braunig's idiosyncratic, illusionistic spaces. Clearly female forms appear in various states of idealization or disfiguration. In *Writhes* (2017)—a narrow, vertical canvas—orange tubes delineate a gridded schematic figure with breasts and rounded thighs. The form appears to be folding in on itself as it sinks between curving leglike shapes, creating a gently erotic work that hints at intricate motion.



Unseen Forces (2017), at forty-two by thirty-six inches, was one of the largest works on view. In front of an undulating orange curtain, a wire-frame mannequin is bent forward as if taking a bow.

A long silver evening glove is clipped to each shoulder. Like many of Braunig's paintings, *Unseen Forces* evokes a sense of the uncanny, with the image alluding to human attributes and tribulations but eschewing flesh and blood.

—David Ebony

The New Yorker

March 2017

**THE
NEW YORKER****ART** GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN**Sascha Braunig**

Meticulous, delirious paintings by the young Maine-based phenom borrow tricks from Op art and Surrealism, while posing decidedly contemporary questions about the fate of the female form in virtual space. Braunig's world is neon-lit and barren but for warping grids and armatures of what look like high-tech alloys and silicone. In the painting on paper "Study for Tenterhooks," stretched coral-colored latex appears to shield a wire figure, her head flopping back on a folding neck. A leitmotif in these seductively bizarre works is a downcast female figure in profile, walking in low heels—she appears both illuminated by acid-yellow light and bathed in lurid red. The show includes one curious and compelling bronze sculpture: the talismanic wild card "Cuirasse," a voluptuous breastplate formed from what looks like wavy spaghetti.

Through April 2.

 Foxy Production
2 E. Broadway
Downtown

212-239-2758

[Website](#)

Frieze

March 2017

Frieze

REVIEW - 28 MAR 2017

Sascha Braunig

Foxy Production, New York, USA

BY DAVID GEERS

If contemporary art and finance have something in common, it is that both ultimately support discourses of faith in search of a foundation – a solid ground on which to leverage risk. This may explain the body's return and outsized presence in recent art. We are embodied beings, after all, and in these uncertain times, the body is at least a constant: an art-historical terra firma. But such narratives are also misleading, since the body is also the result of social processes, their corporeal vehicle and excrescence. In Sascha Braunig's recent show, 'Free Peel', the body is presented as this ejecta: filtered, extruded, woven out of fields and networks. In

Braunig's surreal theatre, the body never assumes positive presence; instead, it remains a negative form, a mesh peeling off or extending from matrices, grids or curvilinear architecture.

As in the artist's previous work, this body disappears, melds with the background or is literally sifted through it—an allegory of all the social mechanisms that over-determine their impact on our corpus. In *Writhes* (2017), Braunig's flattened, wireframe heroine is either trapped or expelled by two undulating rollers. In *Backbone* (2016), she takes the form of a red-hot neon sign: equal parts heating coil and burlesque advertisement. If Braunig's heroine is uncanny – cut out and soldered together yet strangely animate – the artist's aesthetic is temporally unsettling, too, conjuring up retro 1980s sci-fi illustration, 3D digital modelling and surrealist landscapes. *The sunset-hued Free Peel 2* (2016), for instance, recalls the luminous, blended surfaces of Salvador Dalí's paintings. Here, Braunig's protagonist peels off as if from a roller-coaster track, forming her own path in turn. Meanwhile, in *Twist 2* (2016), the figure melds with a grid, reminding us that our individual identities are woven from our experiences of society at large – stamped or hollowed-out like Braunig's characters and, for the most part, rendered anonymous.



Sascha Braunig, 2017, installation view of 'Free Peel' at Foxy Production, New York. Courtesy of Foxy Production, New York

For some, Braunig's paintings may evoke digital associations: it is tempting to compare them to Avery Singer's SketchUp-modelled narratives. Yet, unlike many young figurative artists inspired by virtual spaces, Braunig's practice is decidedly analogue; she makes sculptural models of her set-ups and then paints them from observation. It is a surprisingly traditional approach for a practice so suggestive of data-driven transformation, but one that lends these works their unusual placelessness as well as their manifest vulnerability.



Sascha Braunig, *Cuirasse*, 2016, Cast Bronze with brick red patina, 33 x 28 x 10 cm. Courtesy: Foxy Production, New York

Indeed, the modest scale and delicate surfaces of these paintings demand close viewing, as does this show, which generously exposes Braunig's process, displaying preliminary oil studies as well as the bronze wall sculpture *Cuirasse* (2016). But, while these works serve as compelling windows into Braunig's artistic breadth, I found myself mesmerized by *Free Peel* (2016), perhaps the most compositionally ambiguous painting in the exhibition. Rendered in sumptuous orange and grey, and depicting a figure peeling off a puckered surface, the work dazzles with ricocheting light and interlocking forms while flattening representational space. In this painting, Braunig's vision is as visually exuberant as it is dystopian, and it is hard not to see this figure, like her others, as a stand-in for the artist herself. As a case in point, *Unseen Forces* (2017) depicts Braunig's wire-wrought avatar dangling with arms outstretched and thrust out as an effigy through an undulating, bright-orange curtain. The body appears limp, flayed, hung out to dry: an unwilling actor on a stage. What are these forces – capital, politics, social and cultural privilege? One thing is certain: the stage is one that we collectively construct and one that always exceeds our ambitions

Hyperallergic

May 2016

HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Interviews**

A Painter on the Entangled Relationship Between Figure and Frame

by Samuel Jablon
May 3, 2016

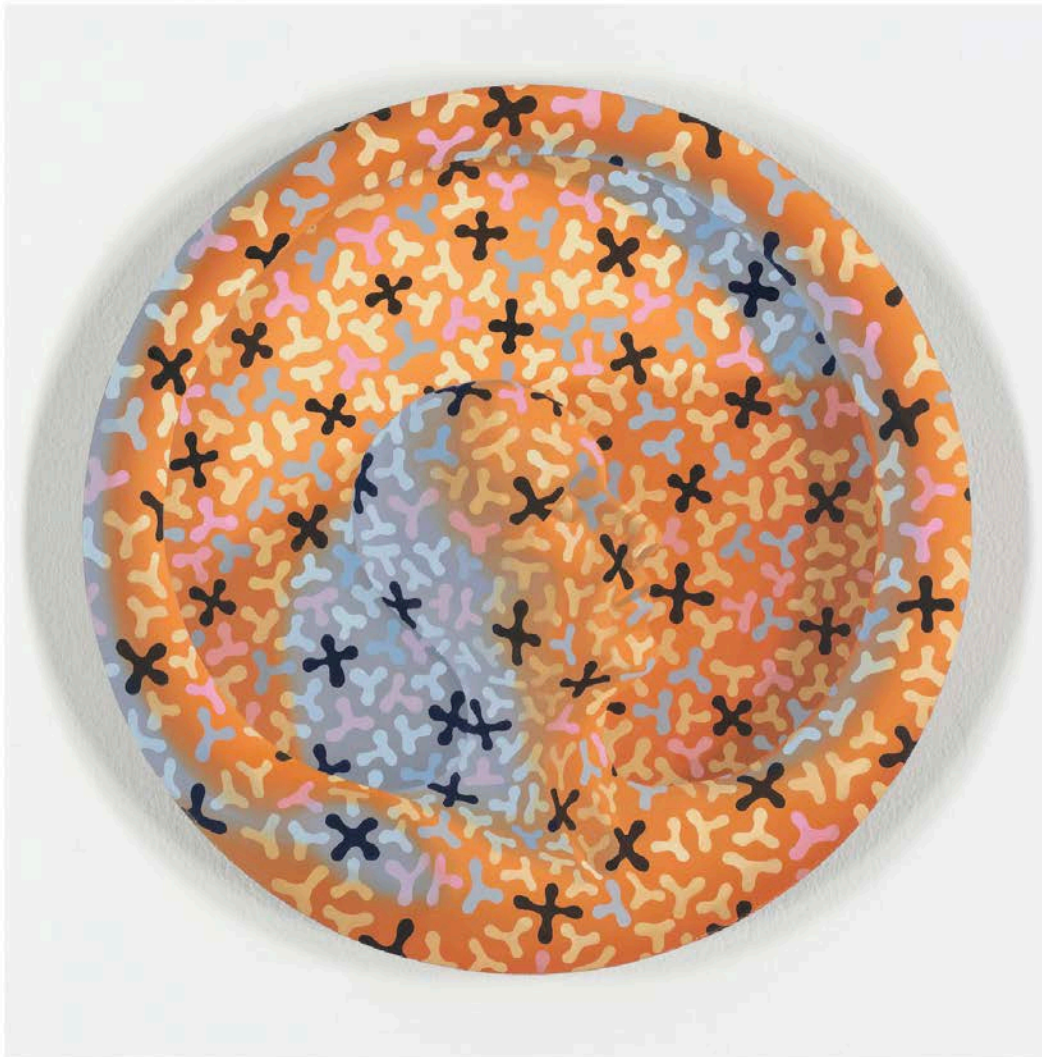
Sascha Braunig, "Warm Leatherette" (2015), 29 x 26.5 inches, oil on linen over panel (all images courtesy the artist and Foxy Production)

Portland-based artist [Sascha Braunig](#) makes wonderfully dark paintings that are filled with color and light. She paints feminine faces and bodies that bend one's vision and nod toward dreamlike states, 1980s science fiction, movies, and the surreal. Representation is lost in these images that are instead defined by pattern, form, and color. In her words, she is "fascinated by analog special effects in films like [The Thing](#) and [Videodrome](#)"; her work captures a similar aesthetic that is reminiscent of a 1980s approach to violence and flesh.

Braunig, who studied at Cooper Union and holds an MFA from Yale University, was included in the most recent New Museum triennial, and is currently in a group show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (MOCA). She also has an upcoming solo exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway, where she will display both her paintings and drawings.

Over the course of a few weeks we corresponded through e-mail and discussed how her work has progressed from model making, to painted portraits, to depicting more body-like forms. Metamorphosing between figure and abstraction, her paintings have an intoxicating quality that is uneasy and charming, creating a comforting darkness that haunts you.

* * *



Sascha Braunig, "Reef" (2015), 12 inches diameter, oil on linen over panel

Samuel Jablon: *When I first saw your work you were making these exquisite models and painting from them. Do you still start there?*

Sascha Braunig: I always start with color studies and ink drawing, and then I build a model for reference. When you first saw my studio, I was building very elaborate models — mannequins that were a 1:1 scale with the painting. They were ornate, but composed of the lowest dollar-store type materials: paint, plaster, sequins, glitter etc. After a couple of years working this way, I felt that I was becoming a fetishistic still life painter, so I gradually transitioned to building the models out of things like modeling clay and thermoplastic that can be reused and repositioned. I've also become more comfortable with my own formal vocabulary, and this allows me to invent and distort things.

SJ: *Is camouflage important to your work? Have you ever looked at [dazzle camouflage](#)?*

SB: Yes. The figures from 2010–2013 were like vacant bodies: all decorative surface. I thought of these skins over the figure as being porous armor, or yes, camouflage — but a flimsy, mortifying kind of camouflage, one that didn't really protect the interior from its encroaching milieu. Now the work has become more explicitly about the subject embedded, entangled in or even infecting its social, virtual, or physical environment — the boundaries between the two are barely there.



Sascha Braunig, model in studio (click to enlarge)

And recently, I've made a number of paintings where the whole space of the canvas is occupied by a sort of engorged body — the painting almost becomes a pillar, an object unto itself, and in this way, the painting/body is totally uncamouflaged in that it starts to intrude into the viewer's space. I have seen razzle dazzle. I love the perverse idea of rendering a massive ship indecipherable through the most garish ornamentation.

SJ: *Would you say that these are self-portraits?*

SB: In a way, yes, but I also aspire for them to be ur-subjects, actively engaging with the confines of painting. They spring from the history of the depiction of the feminine in painting and visual culture, but I hope they also strain against it, even as they adopt its language. In that I am 'female,' I have, for better or worse, fashioned parts of my own self in conjunction with this exhausting history. I'm talking about its crudest, most nightmarish levels, like 1990s-era teen magazines.

SJ: *Could you talk about the difference between your sculptural masks and the paintings?*

SB: I started making masks as props for videos in grad school circa 2007. It was fun to get away from the canvas, and the mask allowed me to remain within a comfortable ‘face-out’ zone. I taught myself some things about mold making and I created a visual vocabulary based on clay that I’m still using. Masks obviously coincide with my interest in illusion, artifice, and costume-as-body. Many of the models are still essentially a bust wearing a mask. At a solo show last spring, I exhibited a cast bronze mask that was the basis for the painting “Chur.” The painting was shown in a different location — I liked this barely noticeable dialogue between source and representation happening across the city.



Sascha Braunig, "Pillar" (click to enlarge)

SJ: *It's been amazing seeing your work evolve over the last few years. Could you talk about the work in your exhibition [Pillar](#) at the Rodolphe Janssen Gallery in Brussels last year?*

SB: The group of paintings in *Pillar* showed the body in various situations: stretched and pinned to a frame, as in “La Maitresse,” emerging towards the viewer

from a mirror-shaped canvas, as in “Extrovert,” or caught in the act of manipulating her own body, as in “Waist Jenny.” I’m trying to make explicit the questions I ask myself: Can the figure bossily occupy the restraining space of the canvas? Can figure and frame start to coexist in an interweaving, almost erotic relationship?

SJ: *Your color choices are really beautiful. How do you decide which colors to use?*

SB: Color is one area that, for me, is pure, fun intuition. I usually work without color to develop an idea, and color studies come next in a gouache or oil sketch. I make choices based on what color I want to see and feel in the painting space, what the form seems to demand, what colors I’ve used already in the group of paintings I’m working on, and maybe other artists I’ve been looking at. I think I’ve been traveling more esoteric color avenues, but it’s always a struggle to look beyond your own natural predilections.

Samuel Jablon: *When I first saw your work you were making these exquisite models and painting from them. Do you still start there?*

Sascha Braunig: I always start with color studies and ink drawing, and then I build a model for reference. When you first saw my studio, I was building very elaborate models — mannequins that were a 1:1 scale with the painting. They were ornate, but composed of the lowest dollar-store type materials: paint, plaster, sequins, glitter etc. After a couple of years working this way, I felt that I was becoming a fetishistic still life painter, so I gradually transitioned to building the models out of things like modeling clay and thermoplastic that can be reused and repositioned. I've also become more comfortable with my own formal vocabulary, and this allows me to



Sascha Braunig, "La Maitresse" (2015), 44 x 20 inches, oil on linen over panel (click to enlarge)

SJ: *Could you tell me about the content and source material of your work?*

SB: These paintings started out as a direct attempt to contribute to a portrait tradition in painting, but rather than depicting real people, they were only provisionally sentient people-shells — their vacancy was derived from fashion photography, as was their artificially hypertrophied surface. As they become more active within the frame, they're now emerging from my thinking loosely about the history of artists' muses, both real women like Unica Zürn and Dora Maar, and unstable characters from fiction, like Jane Eyre's attic-haunting rival, Bertha Mason. There's also the parallel to modern history of women artists using their own bodies — pathological proto-artists like the Countess di Castiglione and trailblazers like Claude Cahun and Madame Yevonde. Because I'm a painter making a figurative image, I do feel

implicated in the history of the invocation of primal women-beasts à la Picasso or de Kooning, but my impulse is to develop oppositional images from within that entanglement. At this moment, my aim is that the paintings' figures seem to be owning the situation of their own fetishistically stylized representation.

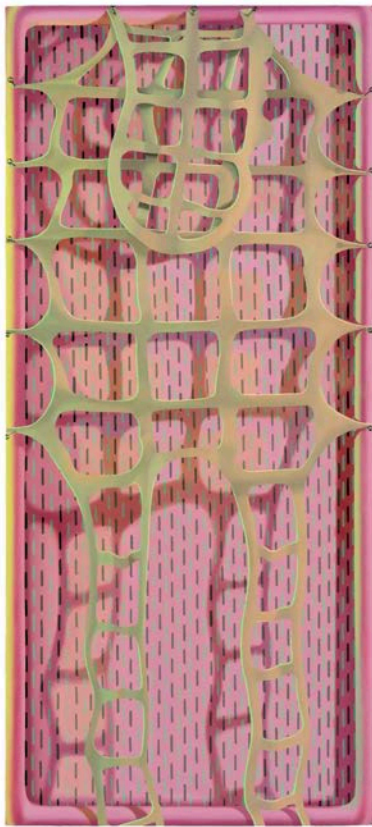
The New York Times

April 2015

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Sascha Braunig

*Foxy Production**623 West 27th Street, Chelsea**Through April 18*

Sascha Braunig's painting "Hide" (2015) is part of her show at Foxy Production. Courtesy the artist and Foxy Production, New York

Sascha Braunig, an inspired reanimator of Surrealism, stands out in the [New Museum's Triennial](#) partly because she persists in making small portable paintings but mainly because she does so in concentrated, hallucinatory celebrations of light, color and space. Her semiabstract canvases center on featureless heads and truncated bodies that match and usually fuse with their backgrounds, wreaking havoc with the modernist ideal of non-illusionistic monochrome paintings. Ms. Braunig's [images here](#) seem to comprise odd, almost tangible things: for example, the undulant white beads or Ping-Pong balls in "[Saccades](#)," the gently inflated knitted or leaf patterns in shades of yellow in "[Troll](#)" and the greige claylike coils in "[Feeder](#)." In fact, most are painted from small sculptures and models made by the artist, although painting them adds a transformative artifice. In "Feeder," for example, the coils become translucent conduits for brightly colored pills being consumed by a female silhouette, also made of coils. To acknowledge Ms. Braunig's three-dimensional sources, a clay mask, "Chur," hangs in the gallery's small second space looking slightly sinister, like a hunting trophy. (It is the model for the painting of the same name in the Triennial.) It accentuates the mood of confinement and regret that permeates the paintings, despite the jewel-like colors. Ms. Braunig's ultimate subject could be the unease of our time. She may be taking hints from Dalí and [Tamara de Lempicka](#) (and also from the undulating patterns of the 1980s artist [Peter Schuyff](#)), but her paintings seem lighted by a monitor's glow. And the future she envisions doesn't look good. One of the most recent paintings is "[Hide](#)," which suggests a human silhouette in drastically perforated leather stretched across a shallow container lined with pink fabric accented by dashes of gray and blue. Whether box, crib or coffin, it is not an entirely pretty sight. **ROBERTA SMITH**

The New Yorker

March 2015

THE NEW YORKER

NEXT STEPS

The future is in the hands of young artists at the New Museum.

By **Andrea K. Scott**
March 20, 2015

Like the show itself, the title of the New Museum’s rousing triennial, “Surround Audience,” succeeds on a few different levels. On the one hand, it’s ominous, as if the fifty-one early-career artists and collectives had a mandate to ambush or quarantine viewers and keep them under surveillance. It also suggests a benign enveloping—the group-show equivalent of a Snuggie. The phrase is the brainchild of Ryan Trecartin, who drew raves as a fully formed star for the digital age during the museum’s first triennial of emerging artists, “Younger Than Jesus,” in 2009. He coörganized this edition with the perspicacious curator Lauren Cornell (who used to helm the online art haven Rhizome), with fewer new-media bells and whistles than you might think.

Granted, there’s an Oculus Rift helmet from the Spanish artist Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, which plunges its wearer into the Brazilian rain forest, in underwhelming black-and-white. But there are also paintings, notably the hauntingly weird and refreshingly small oils by the Maine-based artist Sascha Braunig, pioneering a genre that could be called “post-portrait,” with facelike forms limned in an irradiated, sci-fi palette. The museum lines its lower level with YouTube videos of Steve Roggenbuck’s ranted-word poetry, but it also published a poetry book—a wide-ranging anthology, cheekily titled “The Animated Reader” by its editor, Brian Droitcour.

ARTNews

March 2015

ARTnews

Sascha Braunig Enters the Void: A Q&A

BY HANNAH GHORASHI  March 13, 2015 1:13pm

Sascha Braunig's immaculately rendered paintings seem to exist in their own optical universe. She paints portraits, but only in the most expansive set of that term—"Ur-characters, blanks" is how she describes her subjects. As patterns hum in the background, humanoid elements emerge from fluid ripples of lines, strings, diamond checks, plaids, and herringbones in pinks and greens, orange and blacks, and yellows and blues. Sometimes the figures are jumping-off points from which new designs unfurl, radiating over and obfuscating that trippy backdrop.

Braunig, who was trained at Cooper Union and Yale, is included in current New Museum triennial, and just opened her third show at New York's Foxy Production, which runs through April 18, and includes a new batch of her typically ingenious paintings, in which the senses take precedence over physical laws of nature, time is irrelevant, and where, instead of living, one simply exists. Over brunch one Sunday when Braunig was in New York (she lives in Portland, Maine), I spoke with her about obsession, transcendence, and film.

ARTnews: Why does painting appeal to you over other mediums?

Braunig: I think it's the focus and attention that's required. It sounds a bit corny, but I feel that attention—my own, and other people's—is just so scattered that painting is a really good meditative process for me at this point. It's also a relationship with a material. I've experimented with video and sculpture and other media, but mostly painting is what provides that intense focus for me. It's a kind of journey for me, to play with materials that you can't go back and undo.



Valance (2014/15) by Sascha Braunig
COURTESY FOXY PRODUCTION



Sascha Braunig's *Untitled (Icy Spicy)*, 2011.
COURTESY FOXY PRODUCTION

On your website, you have a single sample painting for each year, from 2009 to 2013. Your paintings seem to have become simpler and more magnified—would you agree?

I think that's accurate. In the beginning, I was really engaged with traditional still-life painting, so I was making these models and painting them really carefully under observation. There was a one-to-one relationship between me and the model I was painting, and I think the hyperrealistic style of painting reflects that. I've started to incorporate the environment more, though, and I'm also inventing more—it creates a different feeling. So [my paintings have] become somewhat more idealized or stylized—I mean, you know it was always stylized.

Are you a perfectionist?

Yeah. I'm not a gestural painter, and I've grown to accept that about myself. There's not a lot of surprise from my perspective—I mean, I go for a different type of surprise and release in my work, but my process isn't uncontrolled. The process is actually very controlled and I guess in that way I'm similar to a graphic artist or someone who uses a computer program—not that I use lasers or anything, but there's a sketch that I transfer to a canvas. Things end up changing, but my paintings don't change a lot from my original conception.

Do you know when a painting is finished?

I have that problem of not knowing when to stop, though I think I'm developing a good instinct for stopping. Maybe that's why the paintings seem simpler. But then again, I'm making more complex backgrounds now so there is that all-over busyness to them.

Because your paintings are so similar in style, I wonder if there's some kind of obsession that motivates you? Or is there a concept that you feel you haven't mastered yet?

That's a good question. I think there's an element I haven't reached yet...it sounds so hokey to say that there's always room for improvement, but there are so many variations on the painting language that I feel I can be involved in for a long time. The paintings seem similar, but I'm actually working out small differences. Things like the frame and background and the position are things that ironically I don't feel like I learned how to negotiate in art school, because art school is not necessarily about learning the little things. So I feel like I'm still learning to paint and I could keep working on that for a long time. But that's not to say that my aesthetic won't change as the world changes.

I've heard your work described as both realistic and surrealistic. Which do you think is the better description?

They're realist in painting style, in the same way that Dalí was trained as a realist painter. There are elements of realism in the way things look. But I think they're fantastical—I don't necessarily think they're Surrealist in a classical sense. Surrealism is something I'm always negotiating, but I'm more interested in the peripheries of Surrealism and artists like Magritte who weren't high surrealists but outsiders. The goals underneath my paintings are also totally different from Surrealist goals. Conceptually, Surrealists were kind of journeying into the self, whereas I'm more interested in the dispersal of the self.

You've said that you are inspired by films like *Enter the Void* and David Cronenberg's movies. Do you think your paintings are transcendent in the same way?

I would love it if my work is transcendent in that way, but I don't know if they necessarily are.

Your work often has the feel of an optical illusion—it makes you dizzy, like a glitch in the space-time continuum.

I'll take that. In terms of David Cronenberg, I'm more interested in his early work more than what he's done more recently—mostly the clinical quality he takes toward his subject. But I think that's in lots of art these days.

You've also spoken of the Northern Renaissance painters with admiration. Do you appreciate extreme detail?

I don't know if I'm interested in going in that direction, but the Flemish painters are definitely my imagined ancestors.

Yeah, Arcimboldo is definitely your ancestor.

I'm more interested in detail in 17th-century Dutch painting in that, back then, it was a competition for other luxury goods. Painting was in the same plane as ceramics and jewelers, so they tried to be more ornate or as ornate as all the other collectibles. That stuff is kind of my go-to room in any historical museum. It's super real, more than realist paintings.

Do you think of the figures you paint as being alive, or conscious of their surroundings? Or are they just the foundation of the patterns that then grow around them?

I was just thinking about this. I don't think of them as being distinct characters—more as subjects or Ur-characters, blanks. They're stand-ins for how I feel. I think they're alive, but I like the ambiguity of that feeling between sentience and death.

I think they look alive, and hopeful in a way.

I'm glad you think so. I think that I do play with an uncanny aesthetic, but I hope that my work is not just playing with dead things. I hope it does mesh with something real in the world.

Artforum

Summer 2015

ARTFORUM**Sascha Braunig**

FOXY PRODUCTION



Sascha Braunig, *Troll*, 2014, oil on linen over panel, 15 × 12".

One of the drawbacks of having been an art critic for a long time is that you sometimes forget what decade you're standing in. When I walked into Sascha Braunig's recent exhibition, her third in New York but the first I've seen, I imagined for a moment that I was back in the 1980s—specifically, in that brief interregnum between neo-expressionism and neo-geo, when what was called neo-Surrealism was the rage, and artists such as Will Mentor, Peter Schuyff, and Tishan Hsu seemed ubiquitous. Their work was typically a curiously manneristic amalgam of organicism, geometry, and Op illusion—a sort of abstract uncanny.

Braunig's work would have fit into that trend with ease. A painting such as *Troll*, 2014, illustrates this: On one level, it's a pure exercise in color control, in which the artist uses phylloid patterning and a palette limited to yellow and periwinkle to construct a clear figure-ground dichotomy in which the figure is the head—not of the gnarled little fellow of Nordic folklore mentioned in the title, or his contemporary descendant, the abusive prowler of the Internet, but rather of something more like a sci-fi monster with a sealed vertical mouth and only the shadows of eyes. Similarly, in *Hilt*, 2015, a three-color system—lavender, yellow, and turquoise—is used to limn a bizarre, polka-dotted, and seemingly single-legged female alien leaning mournfully over a balcony. The paintings are genuinely strange, but the strangeness inheres not so much in their imagery as in its technical execution.

Though Braunig's modus operandi brought back memories, she is also very much an artist of this moment, a fact attested to by her inclusion in Bob Nickas's excellent group show at Anton Kern Gallery, "The Painter of Modern Life"—an apt if probably inadvertent riposte to the limp exhibition "The Forever Now" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York—as well as in the New Museum's "2015 Triennial: Surround Audience." Perhaps her appearance in these exhibitions is an illustration of Nickas's contention that "movements belong to the past, and surely for the best. History will not be rushed along."

True enough. But it gives pause that the neo-Surrealism of the '80s had such effect and then fizzled out so quickly. It lacked staying power, I'd suggest, because its mysteries quickly came to seem so facile. Might not Braunig's work be subject to the same fate? Well, my job description is critic, not prophet. But my inclination in Braunig's case is to think that she seems actually capable of succeeding at what the neo-Surrealists merely attempted. Her paintings are technically sweet—to borrow J. Robert Oppenheimer's notorious phrase—but there is a weight of reality within the cleverness and bizarrerie. It was an interesting surprise to discover that she typically paints from three-dimensional models that she builds—one of these, a face made of loops of clay and titled *Chur*, 2014/2015, was cast in bronze and included in the show—and that in this way she is also a kind of realist: Her work is umbilically tied to the empirical world it might at first seem to refute or deride. Painting ultimately involves a question of belief, not in what we see, but in what we feel. At least some of Braunig's paintings carry palpable feeling. In *Hide*, 2015, what might be a skein of plastic netting could also be (as the title suggests) an animal or perhaps even human skin full of holes stretched across a shallow box. The work's evident artifice maintains this ambiguity—and the ambiguity keeps the somewhat painful sensation evoked by the image alive while fending off any too-exaggerated pathos. It's hard not to believe in it.

—Barry Schwabsky

The New York Times

April 2011

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

SASCHA BRAUNIG

By Ken Johnson

April 14, 2011

Foxy Production

623 West 27th Street, Chelsea

Through April 30

Sascha Braunig cooks up a strange brew of portraiture, Surrealism and luminescent abstraction in her auspicious, first solo [exhibition](#). Painting on medium-small-sized canvases with a sensuous, greasy touch, Ms. Braunig renders humanoid heads that have been weirdly transformed. She works not from life or photographs of live people, but from sculptures made of various materials. To mannequinlike heads she adds fabric, sequins and paint, and she casts them in colored light to dreamy, hallucinogenic effect.

“Chameleon” pictures a bald head painted olive green with a yellow diamond shape painted over the face. It has spheres like Ping-Pong balls in its eye sockets and it is covered with circular sequins, as is the moss green drapery in the immediate background. All this Ms. Braunig renders in paint with earnest attentiveness, creating something like a Bonwit Teller window display by a Salvador Dalí descendant. Two paintings of a woman’s sculptural profile overlaid by bands of colored light — orange and blue in one, yellow and gray in the other — are similarly Surrealistic and even more optically loaded.

Bathed in a red glow, the blue cyclopean being in “Coverage” has a pupil-less eye like a giant pearl centered in a head resembling a Claymation [flower](#). In the nocturnally dark “Eyes Peeled,” a head of tightly wrapped fabric covered with reflective flecks and with a hank of red, flyaway hair gazes back with scary, orbicular eyes like a remonstrative demon. What these enigmas portend I don’t know, but I hope to see more of Ms. Braunig’s spooky progeny in the future.

Artforum

April 2011

ARTFORUM



Sascha Braunig, *Eyes Peeled*, 2010, oil on linen, 16 x 14".

NEW YORK

Sascha Braunig

FOXY PRODUCTION
2 East Broadway 200
March 18–April 30, 2011

The nine portraits that make up Sascha Braunig's first solo exhibition are small but electric. Each painting holds its subject captive in unyielding patterns of intense colors, often with unsettling modifications of presumably human, and possibly female, faces. The generic features and bare shoulders suggest that these figures are merely masks, or grounds for scientific experiments: Eyes are more objects than organs, and mouths are shut tight,

expressionless. This is most disturbing in *Eyes Peeled*, 2010, in which bulbous, exaggerated eyes stare straight out at the viewer. The figure's pink shock of hair is repeated in luminous flecks across her face as it pushes close to the surface, like a victim trying to escape a chemical attack.

The vacant backgrounds of these paintings prevent the viewer from inferring any specific context or place. However, each work evokes a futuristic impulse that recalls the Surrealists' desire to turn their women into uncanny automatons, as well as the luminous urban landscapes of science fiction films. This is particularly apparent in works that show glowing neon lights reflecting off their figures' faces (as in *Lashes*, 2011, where long metal strips are peeled away to reveal a burning red skin below). In other pieces, the "masks" immediately bring to mind the costumes of Leigh Bowery, but with a jarring stillness beneath the extravagant surface. Yet despite these associations, Braunig's paintings remain inventive, especially in the frequent moments when the saturated patterns give way to subtle details, such as the delicate strands of hair that are rendered within radiant orange and blue stripes in an untitled work. Such moments make the figures appear as more than just fantastic fabrications; each one has a unique sensitivity, and their utter strangeness is welcome rather than feared.

—Lumi Tan