



Jenkins Johnson Gallery

Deborah Roberts' "Baldwin's Promise" is one of the artist's images of African American girlhood.

Women's approaches to works of authenticity

Local gallery offerings — photomontage as Roberts' superpower; Linhares' wry comic style

By Charles Desmarais

The pages of the history of photomontage are sketched in the blood of resistance.

Deborah Roberts, whose exhibition "Uninterrupted" continues at Jenkins Johnson Gallery through March 17, embraces that history and, with it, all the power of the technique to redistribute flaccid photographic fact into truthful dissent. Her images, graphically stimulating, gradually come together as a challenge to the conscience as well.

Almost from the beginning of photography, amateurs developed the technique of creating new images from selected rem-

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3 approaches to art and authenticity

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nants of photographs and, later, from shards of magazine reproductions. Women especially often recombined pictorial elements as part of the popular scrapbook hobby, and in the practice found an outlet for expression rare for the time — even if their voices remained confined to personal albums.

In Germany, beginning in the second decade of the 20th century, John Heartfield and Hannah Hoch independently pushed the technique toward artistic ends that were pointedly social and political. Heartfield famously used it in a very public rebuke of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. Hoch didn't have a magazine outlet as Heartfield did, but works with titles like "Cut With the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany" (1919) left little doubt where she stood.

In her contemporary montages, all dated 2017 or 2018, Roberts borrows from pictures famous and obscure to create her own image of African American girlhood, androgynous and empowered.

Often, hands and other body parts are obviously sourced from photos of adults — generally women, but "Baldwin's Promise" gives to one figure the unmistakable eyes of writer James Baldwin. Those eyes might be sculpted from ebony by a master carver, so deeply incised, so unbreakable, so expressive are they.

Splintery features assemble into Cubist wholes. These are not broken victims, they are rugged Transformers, ready for action.

Each figure is a collection of emotions, a multiplicity of gestures and expressions. They are diverse in color, too, as if to make clear that there is no one tone, of skin or of voice, that can encompass the black experience.

Or the experience, even, of a single individual. Roberts' girl-women have their own identity, yet they stand for all.

Practice makes imperfect. Judith Linhares is a Brooklyn artist by way of the Bay Area, as beloved here today as she was when she left the region in 1980. Her exhibition "Out of My Head" is on view at Anglim Gilbert Gallery for only one more week, through Feb. 10.

The show is a smallish survey that gives a good sense of the artist's narrative ingenuity and her idiosyncratic, yet increasingly influential, style.

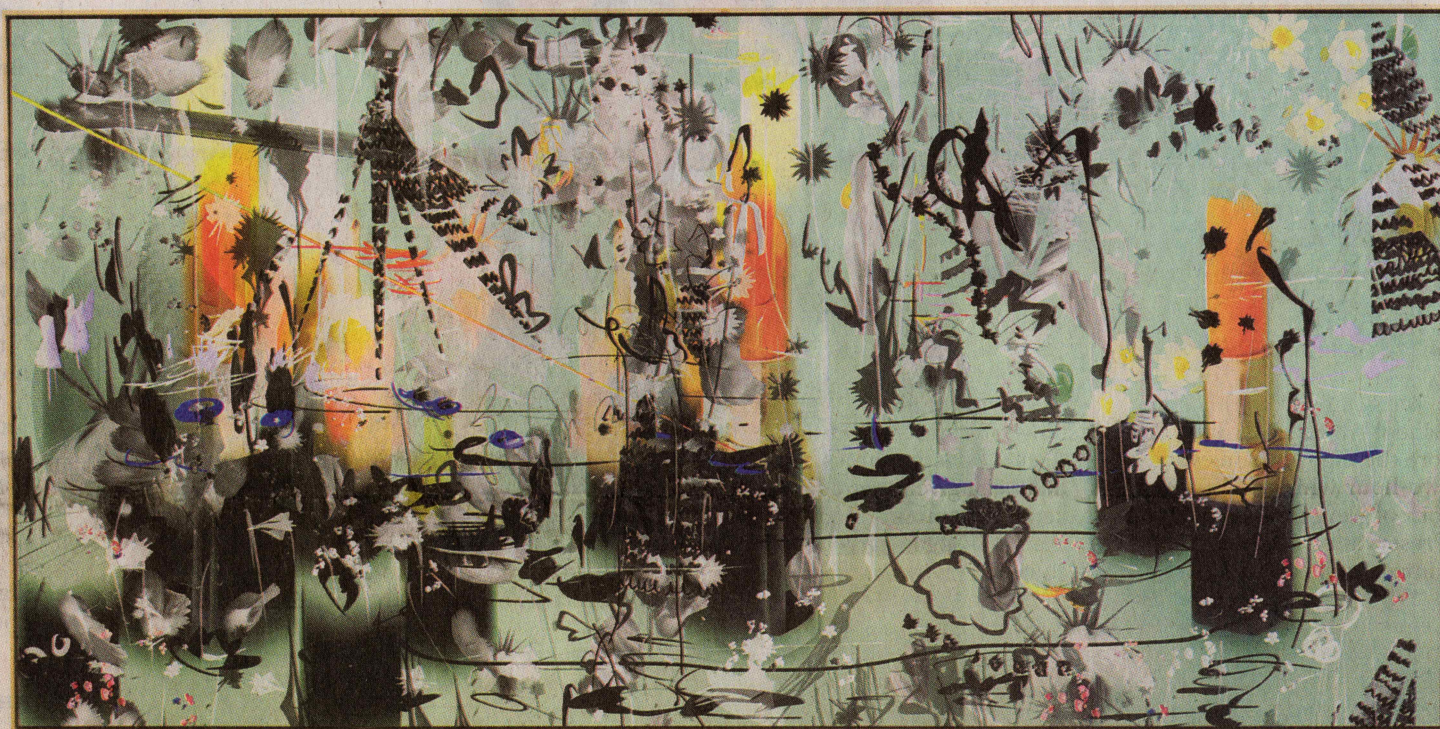
Works from the 1970s show her own influences. "Davy Jones Locker" (1975), in particular, looks like Bay Area work of its day, complete with William Wileyan marginalia and what she later abandoned as extraneous detail.

By the 1990s, though, she had taken on a comically ham-handed painterly persona. To continue on the theme of influence, think Philip Guston after his turn to Golem-like figures in 1970, but with a sunny, often pastel palette that has nothing to do with Gus-



Anglim Gilbert Gallery

"Rabbit," by Judith Linhares, depicts a stern-countenanced animal, not a cuddly bunny to be scratched behind the ears.



Ever Gold Projects / Photo by Jeff McLane

"PCPOWER location at Swissotel chicago" is an enhanced computer screen grab by Petra Cortright at Ever Gold Projects.

ton's fleshy pinks, fiery reds and sooty blacks.

Guston found his stories in his mind's dark corners. Linhares draws upon personal sources, as well, but her visions are less monstrous, if no more cavalier.

The imperious "Rabbit" (2005) is no bunny to scratch behind the ears. "Tricks for You" (1992) is a goofy, but not exactly joyful, performance.

The magic in such skillful bad painting as Linhares has mastered is in its easy virtuosity, its readily felt intensity, its certain claim to authenticity. We see it, notably, in the work of New York painter-of-the-moment Dana Schutz (long overdue for a show here) and others, but it is an impulse that goes back to the so-called primitivism of mod-

ernists like the German Expressionists, and even to the practiced archaism of the ancient Greeks.

And it is an urge freshly seen in Linhares' "Dancers II," a work she made last year.

Meanwhile, on the digital front. I learned long ago to mistrust any strongly negative reactions I might have to art that is unfamiliar to me. That is why I have returned three times to ponder six works the artist Petra Cortright calls paintings at Ever Gold Projects, on view through March 24.

What these are, are print-outs of screen grabs. The captures, as I understand them, are of digital strokes and swipes over stock images, generated using various

graphics apps and tools, in ways both conventional and disruptive. The process gives me no pause — it's the products.

Printed on 10-foot-wide aluminum panels, on stretched canvas or on paper, they are conventionally pretty but utterly affectless. They are all fake brushstroke and synthetic light. I assume they are meant to be cynical, in the way certain fashion images self-consciously undercut the idea of the beauty they set out to sell. They could not be more suited to their moment, and more sad for exactly that reason.

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"Deborah Roberts: Uninterrupted": 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. Through March 17. Free. Jenkins Johnson Gallery, 464 Sutter St., S.F. (415) 677-0770. www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com

"Judith Linhares: Out of My Head": 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Through Feb. 10. Free. Anglim Gilbert Gallery, 1275 Minnesota St., S.F. (415) 433-2710. <http://anglimgilbertgallery.com>

"Petra Cortright: lamborghini lamborghini lamborghini": Noon-5 p.m., Wednesday-Saturday. Through March 24. Free. Ever Gold Projects, 1275 Minnesota St., S.F. (415) 254-1573. <http://evergoldprojects.com>