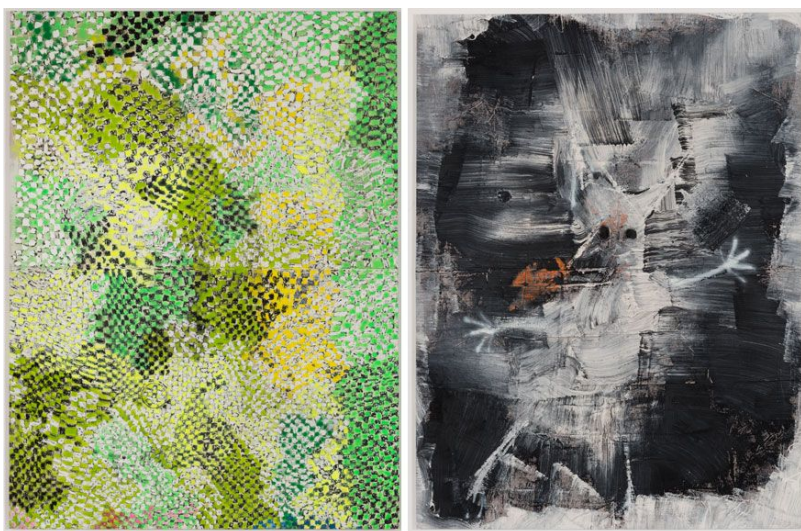


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Not Your Usual “Zombie Formalism”: Harmony Korine at Gagosian

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Harmony Korine's "Fex Chex" and "Creol Teen Revolutions," 2014.
(© Harmony Korine. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Josh White/JWPictures.com)

LOS ANGELES — You don't need to know that the hedonistic abstract paintings at Gagosian's outpost in Beverly Hills are by trash-core auteur Harmony Korine, director of cult movies "Gummo," "Mr. Lonely," and, most recently, "Spring Breakers," to appreciate their dazed beauty. That said, it certainly helps. Gagosian's press release takes care to link Korine's visual art to the "sonic and visual leitmotifs of his films." And sure enough, there's an undeniable camaraderie between Korine's strip-club hued abstractions and the chopped and screwed Gomorrah of 2012's "Spring Breakers." The exhibition, titled "Raiders," features painting that distills the opaque excess of the filmmaker's latest neo-noir fever dream on super-sized, hallucinatory canvases.

The first gallery is filled with five gigantic, irreverently titled abstract canvases from 2014, each one a vertiginous patchwork of jarring tartans in EDM colors. The unapologetically loud "Skinamax Chex" resembles a tapestry of clashing leopard skins with dueling gold, orange, and highlighter yellow checks laced with lavender and hot pink. Hanging on the adjacent wall, "Cortezz Chex" varies on the theme, replacing black squares with icy platinum. "Special Needs Chex," a broken checkerboard of black and red squares on rippled canvas, oozes with the flashy swagger of red leather.

In the adjoining gallery, stripes replace checks as Korine's preferred theme. The hypnotic "Scubby Line" features hundreds of Day-Glo striations punctuated with black lines that cover the

peaks and valleys of a wrinkled canvas. Converging lines suggest multiple vanishing points, intimating a nebulous three-dimensional world somewhere inside the canvas, a blissed-out dream space of hot pink and acid green strata. The tropical excess of “Scubby Line” and the six other stripe paintings is tempered by the menacing “Sinkie Monk,” a portrait of a faceless, possibly gas-masked, man rendered in black house paint on a white safety blanket.

Although Korine — who used to show his work at Los Angeles’s Patrick Painter gallery in the ’90s — has been painting for two decades, many will probably shelve “Raiders” as yet another celebrity art world crossover phenomenon. With contemporary art being the superstar’s hobbyhorse du jour — from the performance art contrivances of James Franco and Lady Gaga to Miley Cyrus’s Jeffrey Deitch-approved “outsider art” assemblages — such territorial anxieties are understandable. When Gagosian announced its first exhibition of Korine’s work at the gallery’s Park Avenue location last year, AFC’s Paddy Johnson wondered whether the trend of celebrity artists is symptomatic of an “increasing lack of mobility for artists within the commercial gallery system.” Moreover, Korine’s chosen format — large, glamorous abstractions — places him treacherously close to the maligned provinces of zombie formalism, critic Walter Robinson’s now-ubiquitous term for an innocuous brand of art fair abstraction characterized by the fetishization of process, a naval-gazing obsession with medium, a morbid fascination with the afterlife of Modernism, and — above all — opportunistic market speculation. While Korine’s work does resemble a certain strain of zeitgeisty non-figurative painting — particularly its more flamboyant, “turnd up” varieties (comparisons could be made to Parker Ito, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Israel Lund, and Ryan Sullivan), it’s a far cry from the handsome sobriety of standard issue sub-Simchowitzian abstraction. So much contemporary painting — as critics, most vocally Jerry Saltz, have griped — seems to be custom-ordered for Instagram consumption, but Korine’s paintings are refreshingly unphotogenic. Their scale and texture don’t come across in jpg format; they require real-time, embodied viewing.

It may seem ironic that Harmony Korine, once the poet laureate of lumpen authenticity, is showing big glossy works at the behemoth of international blue chip galleries. But upstairs, the orgiastic delirium of “Spring Breakers” gives way to the grungy surrealism of Korine’s earlier cult films. The paintings contract in scale; figuration returns in the form of inchoately rendered creepy-cute characters. A baby panda splayed like a de Kooning woman, a white puppy, a globular blue figure with the sad eyes of the Zolof blob recall the puerile dirtiness of Mike Kelley’s dingy, drool-sodden stuffed animals. These nightmare ragamuffins reveal the underside of Korine’s perverse imagination, his ability to shift gears between dissipated glamour and scruffy abjection.

Playing on Korine’s countercultural credentials, the exhibition’s press materials emphasize the artist’s use of nontraditional materials, “eschewing brush and professional paint in favor of squeegees, leftover house paint, and masking tape.” Korine’s own artistic credo, “mistakism,” celebrates the fortuitous potential of randomness, informality, and improvisation. And yet, despite their air of slacker nonchalance, these paintings are still highly polished, slick, and expensive, likely bound for the man-caves of divorced Hollywood dads as tokens of their diminishing cool, like so many mounted vintage Stratocasters. Nevertheless, neither Korine’s celebrity nor his market overdetermines or negates the seductiveness of the paintings themselves or the dizzy pleasure of viewing them in person.

Harmony Korine’s “Raiders” is on view at Gagosian Gallery, 456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, through February 14