

GAGOSIAN

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Four Not-to-Miss Photography Shows

Vicki Goldberg



“Review” (2015), from Andreas Gursky’s “Not Abstract II,” an exhibition at Gagosian through Dec. 23. Credit Andreas Gursky/2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York — VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, via Gagosian

From kitchen sinks to chancellors and immigrants to burlesque queens, these four photography shows light up the season. Three are by contemporaries working in color, and one by a gifted amateur recording America’s diversity in the early 20th century.

The Complex Andreas Gursky

In 1998, Andreas Gursky said, “I realized that photography is no longer credible, and therefore found it that much easier to legitimize digital picture processing.” He was already playing with the medium’s relation to painting, with the line between abstraction and figuration, with an abolition of traditional perspective, with the theme of global commercialism, with picture sizes so large that viewers’ experience of the work changed noticeably at different distances. In the bracing exhibition “Not Abstract II,” at the Gagosian Gallery on West 21st Street — “Not Abstract” because, Mr. Gursky says, “Photography in general simply cannot disengage from the subject” — he also tackles aerial photography; political commentary; the humorous possibilities of viewers’ relation to art; and comic books. An electronic sound installation by the Canadian D.J. and producer Richie Hawtin sometimes seems to emanate from the images as well.

In one pointed, amusing and enormous image, four German chancellors (you will recognize Angela Merkel) sit with their backs to us, contemplating Barnett Newman’s enormous “Vir Heroicus Sublimis” (“Man, Heroic and Sublime”) from so close up that a curator would panic. One chancellor interrupts Newman’s strict, flat, painted surface by sending across it a rococo swirl of cigarette smoke.



Andreas Gursky's "Ohne Titel XVIII/Untitled XVIII" (2015), at Gagosian. Credit Andreas Gursky/2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York — VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, via Gagosian

Mr. Gursky comments on a more contemporary kind of sublime heroism in photographs that feature Marvel comic heroes. In one, in a kind of technological update of King Kong, the all-metal Iron Man embraces an adoring blond woman in a landscape of palm trees that could be an ad for Caribbean vacations, were it not for the sulfurous pink atmosphere.

Three seemingly abstract, multicolored stripe paintings look as if some industrious child had carefully colored in the spaces in paintings by Agnes Martin. Only at a myopic distance from the images do they explain themselves as aerial photographs of rows of cultivated tulips.

A picture of a huge, chaotic welter of books and products in Amazon's warehouse continues Mr. Gursky's observations on the commercialization and globalization of, well, things in general. He has himself become symbolic of what he portrays: In 2007, his "99 Cent 11 Diptychon," a picture of a store for those who cannot afford much more, set an auction record of more than \$3.3 million.

'ANDREAS GURSKY: NOT ABSTRACT II' *Through Dec. 23 at Gagosian, 522 West 21st Street, Manhattan.*