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'New Hells'

By Holland Cotter | July 31, 2014



"Blue Devils," an oil on canvas painting by [Jason Fox](#). Derek Eller Gallery

In a world laid bare to technological scrutiny, a retreat to the psychological dark side seems like a smart idea, and that's where "New Hells", organized by Isaac Lyles, associate director of Derek Eller Gallery, goes. Declaredly pro-weird, the show is a maze of inscrutable references but has nicely sticky visual texture that keeps us looking even when we're not sure what's going on.

Jesse Greenberg sets the mood with a meltdown of a new sculpture called "Brick Birth I"; its burst-through center is festooned with slack restraining ropes. After this, you get some samples of bizarreness past: a maniacal self-portrait by the French political cartoonist and pornographer Jean Veber (1864-1928) and a drawing of a hermaphrodite by the Symbolist Félicien Rops (1833-1898).

We're still in the world of private myth in a 1968 drawing of a hood-enclosed head by Nancy Grossman and in a Styrofoam totem by Huma Bhabha. And we stay there with a trio of paintings: a Bob Marley-Barack Obama mash-up called "Blue Devils," by Jason Fox; Jamian Juliano-Villani's image of a corn-munching E.T.; and Peter Linde Busk's 2014

"Tannhauser (Green Sky)," which takes us back to the myth-maestro Richard Wagner.

In the Symbolist slot, I'd also place Lionel Maunz's 2014 sculpture "Social Pattern Defect." Its iron casts of what look like equestrian gear recall his ambitious solo show at Bureau earlier in the season, a highly idiosyncratic evocation of Paolo Uccello's 15th-century painting "The Deluge," with its nightmare image of flailing men and beasts.

Technology itself turns perverse in sculptures by Ajay Kurian that transform iPad holders into wall-scaling crustaceans, and in a large photograph of a fingerprint by Brad Troemel. Mr. Troemel, co-founder of "The Jogging," an influential group blog, lifted the print from an item he bought in an online market called Silk Road, using bitcoins, a form of digital cash. Silk Road has since shut down, after being implicated in drug transactions, and bitcoins, as unregulated currency, have an iffy reputation. So at least one dark-side realm, that of the Internet, holds perils of its own.

The show does, however, offer at least one un-hellish entry, Rose Marcus's "Hallway Standins I." An inkjet print that layers, in hard-to-determine order, an old photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge with the twin towers in the distance, an image of a drawing of a tree and a portrait of the artist herself, it's a lovely, dreamlike thing, coded with private narratives but full of light.