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Art in Review



ADAM REICH/DEREK ELLER GALLERY

Despina Stokou's "Chelsea Pies 2 (Concordia, Concordia)," a mixed-media painting, evokes a competitive gallery scene.

Despina Stokou

'bulletproof'

Derek Eller
615 West 27th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

The bright, shaggy, acerbic paintings in Despina Stokou's New York solo debut have much room for improvement but also a lot going for them in the here and now. They bristle with scrawled phrases and cutout letters that convey the cyberbabble of everyday life: phrases like "I Love Your Bag!" and "I'm Big in Berlin" are, according to the gallery news release, drawn from the artist's own writings, blog posts, news releases, recipes and an "e-mailed survey of irrational fears."

Moments of legibility rise to the surface and then sink back into the works' eccentric, generally monochromatic tactility. Embedded in the undergrowth are small images of women cut from pornography magazines, as if to suggest the diminishing power of the male gaze.

A sharp ear for language yields titles like "Chelsea Pies 2 (Concordia, Concordia)," which parenthetically quotes the title of Thomas Hirschhorn's overblown installation at the Gladstone Gal-

lery in Chelsea last fall. By deleting the R from Chelsea Piers, it evokes the area's competitive gallery scene as a pie with only so many slices.

Ms. Stokou, who was born in Athens in 1978 and lives in Berlin, has a distinctive approach to paintings as objects. She mounts her midsize canvases on shelves, sometimes angling them to the wall; this makes them more intimate to look at and also easier to read, like tablets or the open pages of large, tilted scrapbooks. A mostly black wall drawing depicts a painting that she pulled from the show because of overcrowding, titled "What will American art tell about our story?" All of the works are accompanied by Q.R. bar codes that, when scanned, provide source material or further commentary.

Ms. Stokou's loquacious, streetwise paintings build on precedents from Cy Twombly, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Suzanne McClellan and Sean Landers to conjure an impression of colliding voices, opinions and needs. Among their weaknesses, they seem prematurely formulaic and overly derivative of an Abstract Expressionist style, even if these are but two more targets of their wide-angle lampoon.

ROBERTA SMITH