

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Melissa Brown

Through July 6. Derek Eller, 300 Broome Street, Manhattan, 212-206-6411, derekeller.com.



Melissa Brown's painting "i,25" (2018) in the show "Between States" at Derek Eller Gallery.
Melissa Brown/Derek Eller Gallery

June 27, 2018

According to a gushy, memoir-style news release, Melissa Brown's current show of paintings, "Between States" at Derek Eller, depicts the drive through the American South and her visit to the folk artist Howard Finster's "Paradise Garden" in Summerville, Ga. Given the paintings themselves, however, and the fact that Ms. Brown is a principal in the artist-run gallery Essex Flowers, which often showcases art created in digital media, "between states" feels more like something else: an analysis of

contemporary painting and vision influenced by new media and the shift from analog images to digitally coded ones.

Windows and screens appear frequently here, as do drop shadows, flattened gradients and the odd perspectives of video games and digital animation. (Ms. Brown paints, prints, stencils and sprays on thin aluminum and Dibond panels, enhancing the screenlike flatness of the works.) The piece “i,25” (2018) shows the view out of a windshield with a smartphone in the foreground mapping the journey, and the driver’s reflection in the rearview mirror.

“Finster’s Mirror House” (2017) copies the early 20th-century open-window-compositions of Matisse and Derain, which were meant to disrupt traditional, Renaissance one-point perspective. “Swamp” (2018) looks like a trippy video-game landscape, but it also echoes Southeast Asian paintings with shape-shifting gods, animals, water and mirrors. “California Common Law” (2018) includes a convex mirror in the corner — a homage to Jan van Eyck’s “Arnolfini Wedding” (1434), which famously played tricks with mirrors and windows.

The road trip (and, in one painting, the view from the artist’s studio in Crown Heights, Brooklyn) serves as a leitmotif, but it’s really incidental. The whole show is an impressive tour — or detour — into states of looking and perception, with only a few slips into gimmickry.

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