

Thomas Erben Gallery

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Galleries

JACKIE GENDEL

Through April 6. Thomas Erben Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-645-8701, thomaserben.com.

I was misled at first by the faces in Jackie Gendel's oils. Half-finished female profiles, for the most part, they flicker like ghosts across a psychedelic shadow world of black and blood-red walls in the artist's new show, "Stained Glass Cliff."

One 4-by-5-foot canvas — like all the others in the exhibition, it's listed with the provisional title "tbt," or "to be titled" — is covered almost entirely with tiny blue faces, as frothy and hollow as fish roe or ocean foam. Sitting over them are large, flat daubs of translucent scarlet and opaque orange and green. In another work, it's not faces but slim white figures being buffeted by a storm of lush black and purple strokes.

How women are portrayed and perceived, in both fashion and art, is clearly on this Brooklyn-based artist's mind, and there's a halo of not-quite-explicit art-historical references. But what the faces are really doing, along with the daubs, the strokes and the intricate but soft-edged zigzag patterns, is keeping your conscious attention engaged while Ms. Gendel's indelible colors stream directly into your unconscious. There, despite the action on the surface, each canvas makes a strangely singular impression of crimson, yellow, or black — like a monochrome that's been flayed.

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