

ARTNEWS



THE WORLD'S TOP 200 COLLECTORS

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COVER BY WILL COTTON

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Valérie Blass, *Why not / Une touche* (detail),
2015, mixed media, 13½" x 7½" x 9".

VALÉRIE BLASS

DANIEL FARIA
TORONTO
MARCH 26 - APRIL 25

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Over the last ten years, Montreal-based artist Valérie Blass has produced a wonderfully sly, seductive, and sinister body of work. This exhibition, her first in Toronto since 2009, consisted of a new group of sculptures and a series of photographs, all made this year.

Blass's three-dimensional constructions, even at their most abstract, suggest human figures—in 2007, for example, she created a series of angular wooden structures covered in fake hair. In this show, however, references to the body were overt. While the disembodied arm and leg at the center of *Je suis une image* recall the work of Robert Gober, the addition of saucy pink panties and a curtain of fake blond hair puts it closer in sensibility to the surreal, feminized objects of Alina Szapocznikow and Louise Bourgeois. Other works surprised with their inventive use of materials. In the wall-mounted sculpture *La méprise*, a figure regards itself in a mirror; its lumpy oversize head is made of an upended ceramic cat covered in velvety black flocking.

Accompanying the sculptures was "Vices," a trio of photographs picturing the artist's hand wearing a sparkly opera glove and presenting flasks or drug paraphernalia. Blass cheekily titled this exhibition "My Life." If her work is truly autobiographical, then we can assume that she is leading an enjoyably self-aware existence.

BILL CLARKE



Joan Mitchell, *Untitled*, n.d.,
felt-tip pen on paper, 9⅝" x 7⅝".

JOAN MITCHELL

FOLKWANG MUSEUM
ESSEN, GERMANY
FEBRUARY 27 - MAY 31

For aficionados of Joan Mitchell's dense, tautly configured paintings, this show of four of the artist's sketchbooks was full of surprises. Some 60 pastel and felt-pen drawings documented the fascination with landscape that Mitchell first explored during her student days at Smith College and that received fresh impulse when she moved in 1967 to the village of Vétheuil, near Paris, where Claude Monet had once lived. The drawings are autonomous works rather than studies for paintings, though the daily view from a balcony at the front of the house, which faced the Seine, clearly informed her painterly aesthetic as well. (Many of her paintings from the time are simply titled *Mon paysage*.)

In the sketchbooks the artist allowed herself total freedom; the works within range from minimal to maximal and from jazzy abstractions to more recognizable images. There is a touching intimacy to these drawings, made far from the querulous, male-dominated bastions of Abstract Expressionism that Mitchell had assailed in New York. It was largely her own landscape that she celebrated during her years in Vétheuil: the magnificent linden tree in the courtyard of her house; clusters of sunflowers; reflections in the river. Made available for this exhibition by a Paris collector, these sketchbooks seem certain to reshape our understanding of Mitchell's painting.

DAVID GALLOWAY