

CRITICS' PICKS

Friday, November 21, 2008

New York

Karen Heagle

I-20 GALLERY

557 West 23rd Street

November 1–December 6

Vultures—sitting near carcasses, picking at trash, and gazing blankly from the trees where they perch—appear in several of Karen Heagle's recent paintings. Although these avian subjects can be seen in light of the current economic climate, they also evidence the artist's use of symbols, a practice that simultaneously invites and excludes the viewer. Heagle's stylized paintings depict immediately recognizable objects and people and use generic titles that are equally intriguing and frustrating. *Woman with Snake*, 2008, for example, offers exactly what the title suggests, as a sensual yet aloof nude reclines, oblivious to the animal coiled next to her. While this subject matter bears art-historical currency—an allegory of sin or decadence—Heagle's straightforward titles leave interpretation to the viewer's discretion, and in the end, only the exhibition's title, "She'll Get Hers," alludes to a deeper meaning. The esoteric content of her pictures is enhanced by their thick, painterly execution. Acrylic and ink are applied to roughly trimmed paper in blunt strokes, creating a sense of physicality enhanced by her improbable use of bright and iridescent hues. One senses in these works, as the show's title suggests, physical unease and anticipation, as well as a realization of the fluidity of symbols and the deeper meanings they hold.

—Britany Salisbury



Karen Heagle, *Vultures in Tree*, 2008, acrylic and ink on paper, 55 3/4 x 55 1/2".

<http://artforum.com/picks/section=nyc#picks21486>