

Art & Design

ART IN REVIEW

'Marcel Duchamp': 'Nude Descending a Staircase: An Homage'



Dana Martin

"Nude Descending a Staircase: An Homage" at Francis M. Naumann Fine Art.

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*Francis M. Naumann Fine Art
24 West 57th Street, Manhattan*

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"I spent my life hidden behind it," Duchamp once said of his "Nude Descending a Staircase," the Cubo-Futurist painting that shocked visitors at the Armory Show of 1913. It's hard to say whether he'd be tickled or ticked off by this tribute, for which the dealer Francis M. Naumann has tracked down some notable ripostes to Duchamp's painting and invited further responses from a diverse group of contemporary artists.

It's worth refamiliarizing yourself with the painting's antic, mechanized anatomy through Duchamp's reproductions of it (hand-colored collotypes that came with his "Box in a Valise") and in studious appropriations by Mike Bidlo and Sherrie Levine, artists whose debts to Duchamp (though not specifically to "Nude") cannot be overstated. A photocollage by Hans Richter from 1946 tweaks Duchamp's formula with a stepped arrangement of bodiless heads; a 1966 film by Yoko Ono zeros in on a wobbling posterior.

Jokey reimaginings abound, especially in the new works, like Pamela Joseph's "Censored Nude Descending a Staircase" (with the figure a pixellated blob), or Thomas Shannon's assemblage of a slinky and a zigzag of wood. One is a homage to a homage: Kathleen Gilje's version of Gerhard Richter's 1965 photo-painting "Woman Descending the Staircase," with a transgender nude (definitely not Rose Sélavy, Duchamp's alter ego) standing in for the woman in evening wear who appears in Mr. Richter's work.

Here, too, is a blowup of a photograph that ran in Life magazine in 1953, when a Dada show organized by Duchamp opened at the Sidney Janis Gallery. Taken by Eliot Elisofon with multiple exposures, it shows Duchamp enacting his own frenzied descent and, seemingly, acknowledging the journey of "Nude" from succès de scandale to Sisyphean burden.

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