

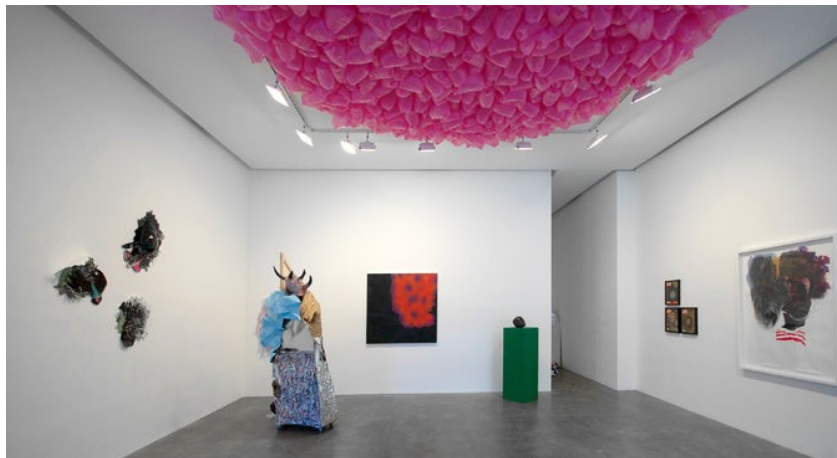
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'American Beauty'

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Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER



A view of the "American Beauty" exhibition at the Susan Inglett Gallery in Chelsea includes the ceiling installation "Pink Sky." Susan Inglett Gallery, NY

Susan Inglett Gallery

522 West 24th Street, Chelsea Through Feb. 1

The idea of this group show, organized by the artist William Villalongo, is that art can look good and think tough at the same time, and so it can. A ceiling installation called "Pink Sky" by Maren Hassinger sets the tone. A big, pretty cumulus made from inflated plastic shopping bags, it refers to a 1970 performance piece by this artist for which she painted trails of pink paint through burned-out black neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

Rico Gatson's abstract "Watts Painting #4" looks back to the same period; it's adapted from a video still of that city's 1965 Watts riots, an image of disaster here sugarcoated with glitter. Other work draws on similar cosmetic enhancements: nail polish in the case of Nicole Awai's gorgeously sinister wall sculptures, crystals and beads in Alejandro Guzmán's assemblage called "The Fatalist," which, like an African masquerade costume, is both funny and monstrous.

There's a lot of expertly made violence on hand: torn-apart heads, for example, in a bronze sculpture by Suntek Chung and in a drawing by Nathaniel Mary Quinn. Ariel Jackson's stop-motion animation "Here's Hoping AKA the Blues (Episode 1)" broadcasts ethnic clichés at the same time it shoots them down. And old stay-at-home Minimalism has a global moment as Dawit L. Petros, seen in photographs, carefully carries a pure cubic form — a cardboard cartoon — from Texas to Ethiopia.

And best of show comes from Matthew Day Jackson and his mother, Karen Jackson. After Mr. Jackson cuts out images from 1960s Life magazine covers, his mother mends the excisions with needlepoint. Her restoration, in high-color thread, of the continent of Africa to a Life photo of the 1964 World's Fair Unisphere in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens, says much about how to size up damage and make it nice.