ART IN REVIEW

Devin Troy Strother: 'I Just Landed in Rome'

By KEN JOHNSON
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In Devin Troy Strother's infectiously exuberant show are three nearly identical cartoon figures of dancing black women in glittery dresses, each cut out from an 8-foot tall, 1 ½-inch thick panel and leaning against a gallery wall. One is called "look at my guuurl! Sha'riece over there getting her shine on (with that John McCracken lean)." The other two titles have the name Sha'riece changed to Sha'niece and Sha'triece. John McCracken refers to the sculptor whose Minimalist planks similarly lean against gallery walls. Mr. Strother thus connects high art, kitschy cartooning and street talk. Also in the show, "guuurl you know I loves me some Yves Klein tho," has a silhouetted nude female doing a split on top of a cube painted blue, albeit not quite Yves Klein blue. "Damn guuuurl have you seen that bitch Shanice, lately, tss she got big guuurl," a monumental nude cut out of a half-inch thick aluminum sheet and painted black, invokes the Modernist tradition of the exotic female à la Matisse.

While toying with signs in familiar Pop Art style, Mr. Strother also is doing something specifically African-American: "signifying," a practice described by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in "The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism" that has speakers playfully messing with conventional languages to undermine top-down social order. Mr. Strother is not only a signifier, he's a meta-signifier who signifies about signifying. Like his signifying colleagues David Hammons, Kara Walker and Jayson Musson, he proffers heady therapy for rigid minds. (Don't miss his hilarious cowboy-and-Indian collage paintings in the gallery basement.)

Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough Chelsea

Devin Troy Strother's "look at my guuurl Sha'niece over there getting her shine on (with that John McCracken lean)," from 2013.

331 Broome Street,
Lower East Side
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