



*Blackout*, installation views, through March 25

These days, Lower East Side galleries are chockablock with emerging painters who've consigned to history the debate over the medium's efficacy. So, it's interesting that youngish artist Matt Hansel appears to indulge this issue in his show "BLACKOUT." Referencing Old Master techniques, pop culture, and modern and abstract art, he uses revivalism to recast an old argument.

A gallery statement associates blackout with World War II air raids, but another connotation—a loss of consciousness accompanied by amnesia—seems more pertinent here. In one series, the word appears as a comic-book-cover title above compact fields of grays littered with pictorial fragments, expressionistic brushwork and Cubistic fractures. At the bottom edge of each painting, a trompe-l'oeil porcelain figurine sits with its back to the viewer as if gazing out of a window with the shade drawn tight.

Elsewhere, Hansel offers his take on Théodore Géricault's masterpiece *The Raft of the Medusa*, substituting an easel-bound painter for the original's shipwrecked survivors. The figure itself is an amalgam of Dutch still-life elements clumped into a Frankenstein monster of exhausted tradition.

Hansel's nihilism makes you wonder what he's getting at—that art history is a flat circle doomed to spin in an ever-looping circuit? A grim proposition, though not one completely unsupported by our cultural moment.

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