

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Los Angeles

Margaret Lee and Emily Sundblad

HANNAH HOFFMAN GALLERY

1010 N. Highland Avenue

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“You Can Teach an Old Zebra New Tricks,” the second collaboration between New York artists Margaret Lee and Emily Sundblad, chases the tail of their first. For 2013’s “Für die Kinder Düsseldorfs” (For the Children of Düsseldorf) at Off Vendome, the pair realized a suite of furniture draped with sheets and painted to resemble jungle animals pulled from the pages of *Curious George Takes a Job*. In the beloved children’s book, George’s gig as a window washer offers him a glimpse of housepainters at work; when they take lunch, he takes over. Rather than coating walls white, though, George turns the room into a cheerful mock-up of his native Africa. Clearly, George is a born artist: He ditches gainful employment to find happy failure.

At Hannah Hoffman, a series of window scenes painted on “roller blinds” depicts, as if from the perspective of a curious window-washing monkey, glimpses of these same giraffes, lions, and zebras rendered in brushy, childlike strokes of primary colors. One loose, yellow frame (*Blinds #2*, all works 2015) shows the cartoonish rage of the apartment owner upon seeing George’s work; a cheetah’s turgid tail slips behind green curtains. The back of the zebra on another shade (*Blinds #6*) provides the motif for four novel sculptures, *Zebra Chair #1–#4*: custom chairs skirted with dry grass and patterned in black pinstripes, tiger stripes, wedges, and leopard spots. Reimagining the zebra seems to have made painting fun again—as if the titular zebra were the medium. Indeed, if the pesky necessity of labor stalks many to the grave, Sundblad and Lee take their cue from George. Mixing species and media in sculptures dressed like the party-store idea of indigenes, the artists make hybrids of such mortal enemies as meat eaters and grass eaters, reality and imagination, “work” and “play.” In a bright white gallery, after all, a degree of professionalism can’t help but cut with irony the blithe glee of *Curious George*: “What wonderful paints and brushes they had! George could not resist . . .”



View of “You Can Teach an Old Zebra New Tricks,” 2015.

— Travis Diehl

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