

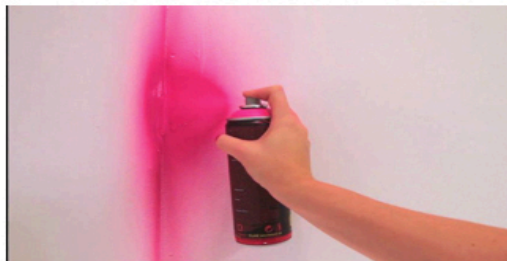
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Sep 18 Review: The Great Refusal: Taking On New Queer Aesthetics/SAIC Sullivan Galleries

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Michel Foucault opined that, in a gay affair, the “best moment is when the lover leaves in the taxi;” this nostalgic melancholia now typifies much queer theory. A preference for the backward view is central to Lee Edelman’s book “No Future,” and an overall gloom permeates Judith Halberstam’s “The Queer Art of Failure.” In the group show now at the

Sullivan Galleries, “The Great Refusal: Taking On New Queer Aesthetics,” the negativity embedded in the title makes a thematic demand that much, but not all, of the work is equipped to address.

The dominant presence is the documentary residue created by sculptural performer Jeanne Dunning. Her 1994 video of herself sucking her own toe is in there, as is a selection of her photographs depicting drooling mouths and messy hands. The physicalized neurotic and libidinal excess in her images resonates in recent works throughout the show, like Alex Zak’s mixed-media sculpture “Articulated,” a flaccid zitty pink blob dangling over a buckling little shelf and bounded by a white frame; Hannah Rodriguez’s “Made Men Series,” attractive collages in washed-out hues depicting figures obscured by flowers, and two pieces made of animal hide; a drapery stand by Susan Kimball, “Our Deluge”; and “Unlimited Intimacy,” a giant teddy bear by David Nasca.

Dunning’s abject provocations especially illuminate the show’s most suggestive nods to transgender identity, as do Beatriz Aquino’s “Lesbian Study 1,” a photo of three abdomens, one nude and sporting a grafted penile appendage, as well as Ali Scott’s two untitled photos, one of an ambiguously “female” crotch above a pair of stockings, and the other an unrecognizable figure sitting on a bench completely swaddled in fabric. Barbara DeGenevieve’s video “A Cappella,” a tall screen featuring a nude middle-aged woman, making little concession to contemporary standards of youthful beauty and confidently singing steamy torch songs, bridges the more morose, corporeal work (which I personally prefer) with the implied optimism of clean design, graphic sexuality (pun implied), and exuberant color in pieces such as Kate Hampel’s glittery wall-and-floor-text piece “Wish List,” Jamie Steele’s untitled dripping pink spray-paint blasts into sundry corners, Steven Frost’s pair of polychromatic assemblages entitled “Balcony,” and Elijah Burgher’s “Enclosure” for undisclosed ritual action, a standing frame with four hanging vividly-painted canvas walls. (Bert Stabler)

Through November 10 at the Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 33 South State, seventh floor.

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