



ELIZA  
DOUGLAS

# ELIZA DOUGLAS

**Born 1984 in New York**

**Lives and works in Berlin and New York**

<http://www.airdeparis.com/artists/eliza-douglas/oeuvres.html>



It's the material limits of painting, its incapacity to hide the elements that compose it, and its potential to become an image, that prompted Eliza Douglas to work with this medium in the first instance.

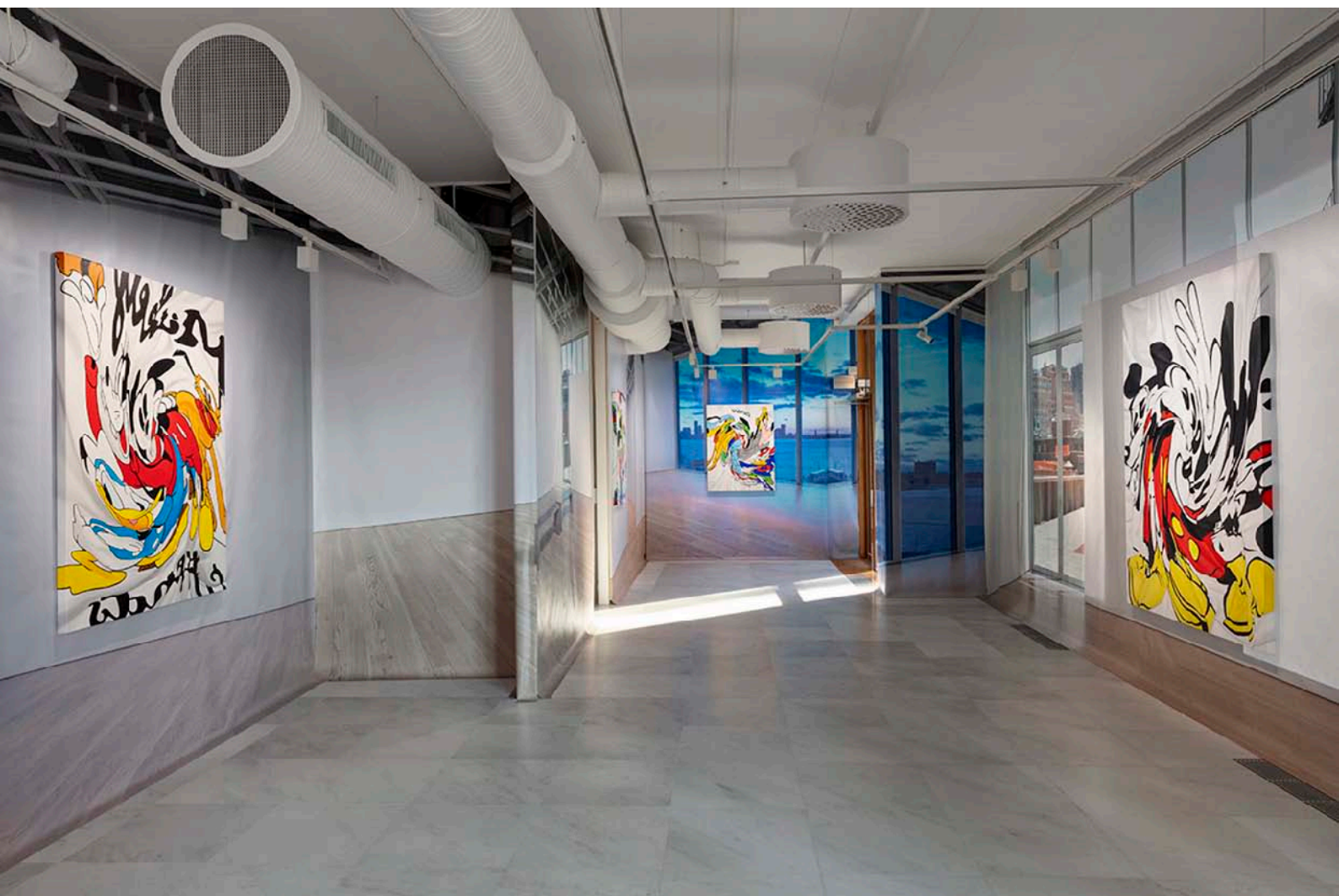
Since 2016, the artist's being painting series — disembodied hands and feet, male models in minimalist interiors, birds, pack of cigarettes inside shirt's pockets, exhibition views of Josh Smith's shows, crumpled t-shirts, amongst others — whose variations and reconfigurations seem inexhaustible.

If Douglas' pictorial vocabulary calls to mind aspects of Pop Art, Abstract Expressionism, or Hyperrealism, her paintings are more interested in inquiring about the status of the image, its construction, its circulation and fluidity, producing an ensemble of new yet recognizable images, sensual yet cold, laced with cool humour, sometimes tainted with gothic romanticism, and immediately photogenic and consumable.

Eliza Douglas creates meta-paintings fully conscious of their status and their history, often presenting mises en abyme of images extracted from publicity, the art world, pieces of fashion, or other consumption goods, reminding us that painting is, as well, consumed.

Multidisciplinary artist, Douglas regularly and closely collaborates with Anne Imhof as a performer and musician.





The Whitney Biennial, VI VII, Oslo, Norvège, 2022

For her solo exhibition at VI, VII, Douglas presents six new paintings set against a vinyl/pvc backdrop picturing the interior of The Whitney Museum in New York.

This ironically titled exhibition is the second occasion in which the artist has used banners to transform a gallery into a larger public institution. For "Notre Mort,"<sup>(1)</sup> an exhibition at Neue Alte Bruecke in Frankfurt, Douglas draped the gallery in backdrops picturing the interior of Palais de Tokyo with all the works erased. Referencing Anne Imhof's 2021 Palais de Tokyo exhibition "Natures Mortes," a large-scale multimedia exhibition in which Douglas was heavily involved as a lead performer, composer and artist, with several of her works included—the backdrop presented Douglas' works as the only ones on view.

Here at VI, VII she merges two primary experiences: the magical world of Disney, with its mesmerizing cast of characters, and an her first encounters with the larger art scene. Douglas has never participated in The Whitney Biennial, but she has attended them. As one of the largest surveys of American art, it is one of the first larger artworld events that young artists in New York become keenly aware of and it opens up a set of possibilities and a view onto the international scene.

In terms of visual motifs, Douglas' paintings in the exhibition distort the magic of Disney: a larger-than life cultural giant, that like looking back on first contact with the artworld and its happenings, evokes nostalgia.

Surreal perspective lines and the clash between her paintings and a transplanted interior, bring the show into dialogue with larger conversations about the transient aspect of installation views throughout much of art history. Traditionally, paintings shed their installation, the views being lost to time, quite often less frequently reproduced. Here the reverse happens and they form a confounding viewscape of a show that both is and never was.

THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL is the first solo presentation of Douglas' work in Scandinavia and overlaps with the actual Whitney Biennial which opens in New York on April 6th. Using titles to mislead and cause confusion follows other gestures of appropriation by the artist, most notably when she reproduced an artist's entire oeuvre from web documentation for her 2019 exhibition "Josh Smith,"<sup>(2)</sup> but also extending to her recent use of graphic t-shirts for inspiration.

Since 2019, when she presented the sculpture "Pile" a mountain of cotton t-shirts printed as merch for rock concerts, political campaigns and other causes at Tate Modern, the artist has been working with and drawing inspiration from graphic t-shirts most recently

creating hyperreal images in oil on canvas from photographs of T-shirts crumpled on the floor. Agents of commercialized popular culture and underground ephemera, cartoons and band logos are abstracted, amplifying the paintings' existence as a commodities. In continuation of this series, which reanimates the static surface of the t-shirt, Disney's cast of characters swirl forming a center point of enchantment, a hypotonic, added element of seduction.





Untitled, 2022  
oil on canvas  
210 x 160 cm  
unique





Untitled, 2022  
oil on canvas  
210 x 160 cm  
unique





Untitled, 2022  
oil on canvas  
210 x 160 cm  
unique





«Notre Mort», Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt, 2021



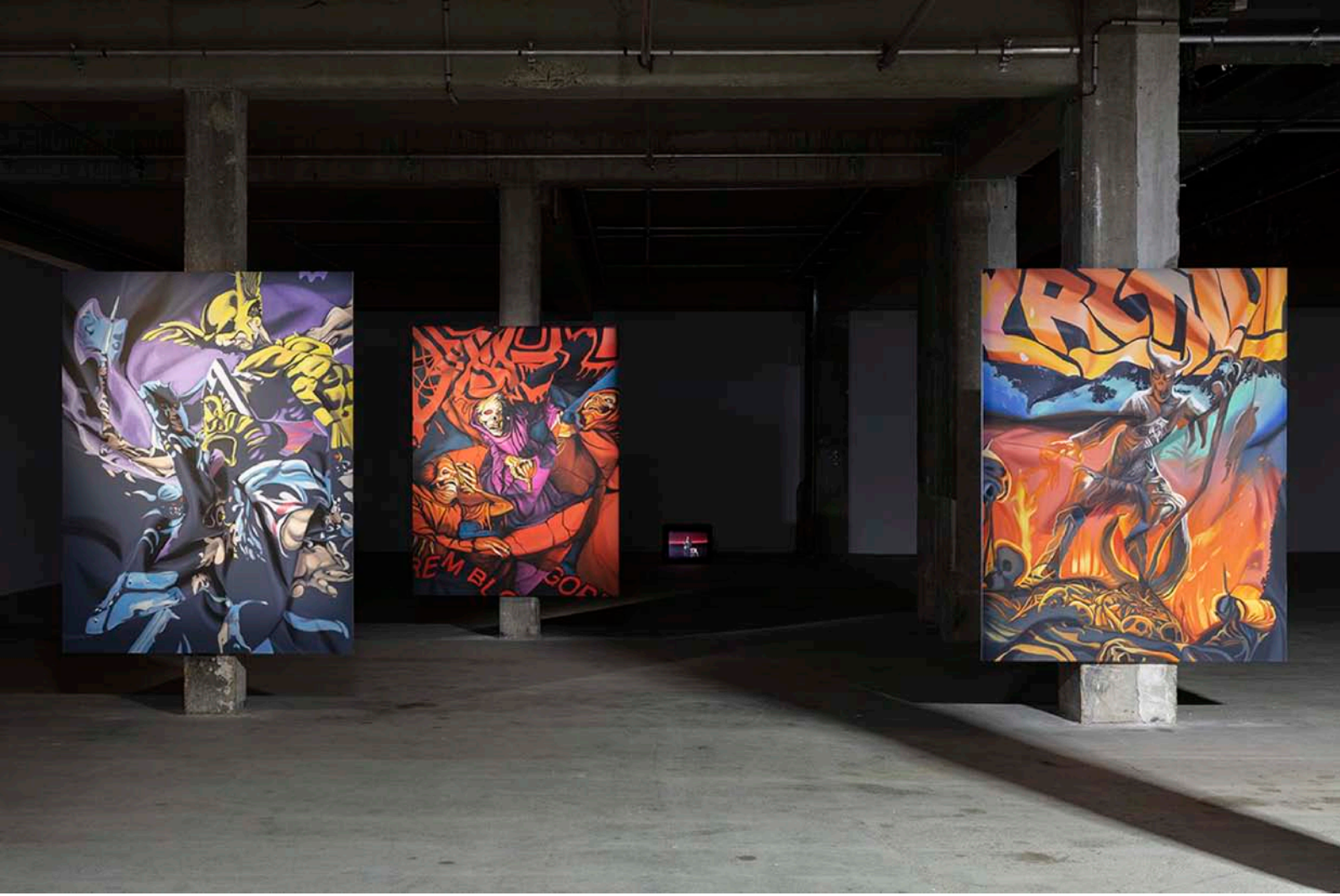
For her first solo exhibition at Neue Alte Brücke, Eliza Douglas presents five new paintings. These are installed upon prints on vinyl of digitally edited installation views of a large-scale exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo that Douglas was intimately involved in as a composer and performer.

Douglas first worked with t-shirts in her sculpture *Pile*, 2019, a throng of black graphic tees heaped directly on the gallery floor. Highlights from Douglas's personal collection of t-shirts—accumulated from street stalls and online marketplaces—have since inspired a series of bright, untitled paintings that warp historical oppositions between high and low culture. Douglas photographs t-shirt graphics with her iPhone, meticulously producing hundreds of images to reach the right composition. The images are digitally contorted to simulate wringing, swirling or crumpling, and then rendered in oil on canvas by an ensemble of painters. While early artworks in the series featured only slight interventions, Douglas has increasingly amplified the distortions. In using merchandise as source material, the works recall a tradition of recent painting discourse that reflexively addresses the commodity form. As well as examining art's valorized status as property, the series considers its integration within everyday commercial products. In genres of performance such as heavy metal—a genre that Douglas often turns to—merchandise unambiguously supports live shows. By exploring a similar cultural logic within contemporary art, Douglas probes the entangled economies of objects and performance. In foregrounding their status as merchandise, the paintings question formal hierarchies within the artist's wide-ranging practice as a performer, musician, model and painter. They point to a porous relationship between fine art and popular culture, the global character of which is emphasized by the network of outsourced technicians that the artist employs.

In a new development in Douglas's work, the paintings are hung on vinyl *mise-en-scène* backdrops that cover some of the gallery's walls. These derive from Anne Imhof's exhibition "Natures Mortes," which was on view through October 24 at the Palais de Tokyo. Douglas is a lead performer in this sprawling multimedia production, which extends through the entirety of the institution and features works by over 20 artists alongside objects by Douglas and Imhof, and

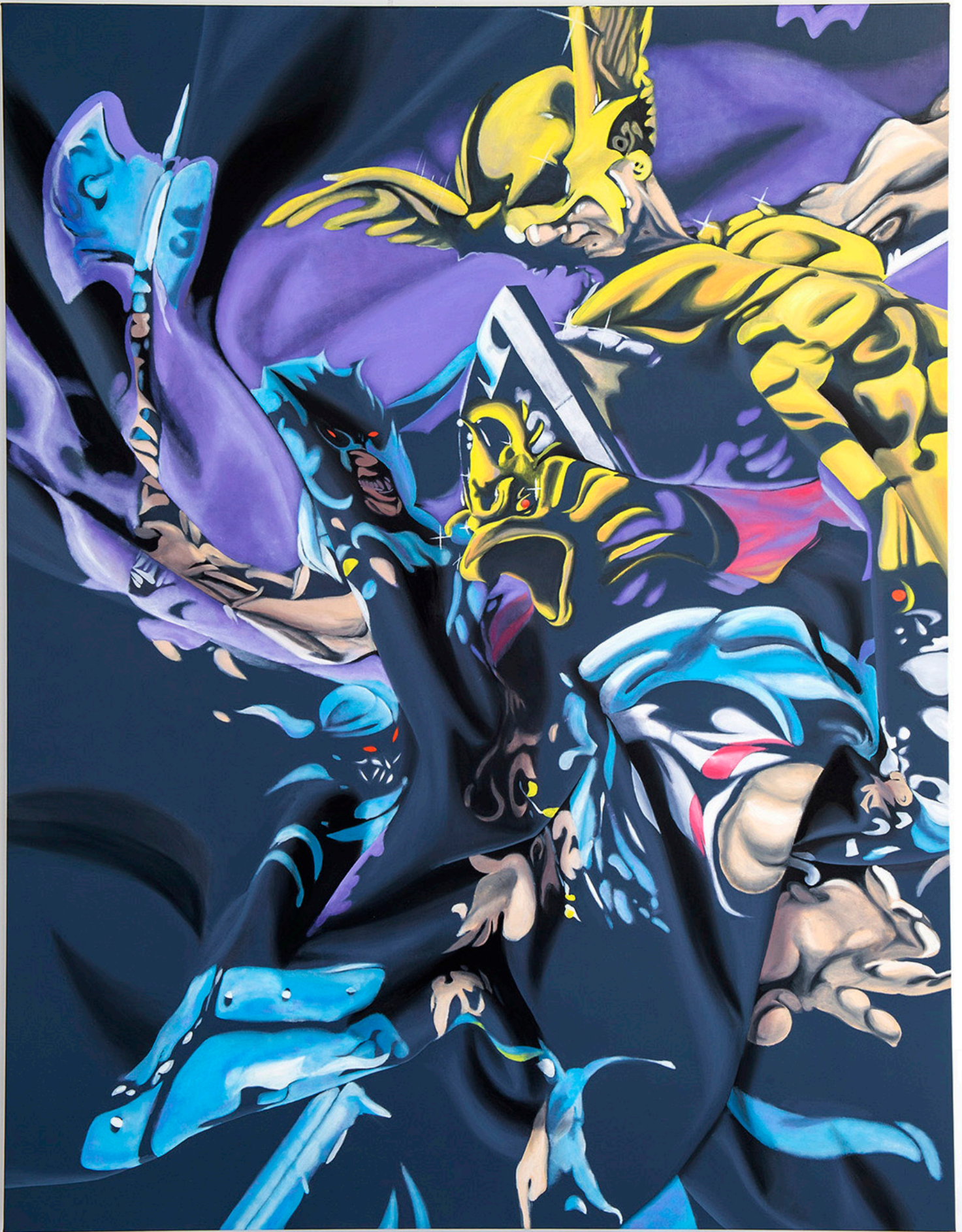
has composed its score. The installation images on view have been retouched to remove artworks, the Palais de Tokyo's interior vacated of all but the graffitied glass panes that Imhof transported to Paris from an abandoned office building in Turin. Douglas's dislocating gesture situates Neue Alte Brücke in an expanded geography of postindustrial architectures repurposed for display, and further destabilizes the balance of power between artist and collaborator.

Linking the two series of works in this exhibition is Douglas's interest in the slippages between performance and product in contemporary image flows. In *The Expediency of Culture* (2003), George Yudice describes performativity as a key framework for analyzing culture and politics in the present. With slick referentiality and modish humor, Douglas's work traces the imperative to perform across various sites and media, as encapsulated by a bubbly Sailor Moon graphic or the instrumentalization of urban redevelopment as a material ground for painting. In the process, Douglas interrogates the shifting foundations of—to borrow two loaded words from the vocabulary of fashion—style and agency



«Natures mortes» carte blanche à Anne Imhof, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2021





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





« Orgy of the Sick », Overduin & Co, Los Angeles, 2021



In an essay on Douglas' work, philosopher and art historian Juliane Rebentisch has written:

*The Commodity of Commodity Culture.* T-Shirts are preferred products for merch. Merch Ts are commodities that advertise other commodities – music, films, video games, sport events or the brands of their sponsors for instance. But they also generate value, sometimes even more than the product they advertise. As products geared towards fan culture they document and project the affective potential commodities have for their consumers. They are markers of identity – a T has to fit its owner, but the owner must fit the T as well. Fitting is the adjective denominating the relation the subject of taste maintains vis à vis the objects of her choice; even in cases when the T is not supposed to display naïve fandom, but an ironic twist on it. It is well known that one of the main goals of commodity consumption in capitalist societies is to advertise oneself as a commodity (one's labor). In recent decades, as originality, creativity, flexibility have become decisive social demands, consumer competency is less and less governed by predetermined social codes. Instead, the aim is to perform the greatest possible degree of independence from such external constraints. Under these conditions, the economy of distinctions works horizontally: The more comprehensive the cultural spectrum and the greater the financial abilities, the more convincing the impression of having attained confident mastery of consumerist taste. The more convincing the impression of a freedom of consumption no longer hobbled by the old distinctions between high and low, the more effective the demonstration that one is attuned to the most recent developments and therefore culturally flexible and marketable oneself. In contrast with the so-called good taste of the old bourgeoisie, this new one seems to be defined less by the ascription of value to the products themselves. Instead, it emerges in its own double-character: as choosing/adapting.

*Pile.* In her work *Pile* (2019) Eliza Douglas showed a huge heap of T-shirts, originally produced as merch or simply as byproducts of contemporary visual culture. Auratic remnants of what could have been clothing for herself the T-shirts were also displayed as what they potentially become once they are abandoned by their owners: worthless objects thrown on a pile of waste, exposed in their bad quality, as trash. It is because of this ambivalence as both attractive and repulsive, embedded in social relations and left behind in their thingly substance that these Ts became hieroglyphs of value. For what one could see in the oscillation between their appearance as epitomes of hipness on the one hand, worthless junk on the other, is that value is neither a property the commodity possesses nor is it a certain amount of labor stored in it but a dynamic social relation. If Eliza Douglas displays her own taste in this work, it is a taste not only for the instability of the objects' value themselves, but also for their innate sickness unto death.

*Distortions.* The series of paintings on show transpose

images of some of those Ts onto canvas. What we see is not the entire garment but details of its textuality, obviously not on anybody's body but thrown flat on the floor, its motifs distorted through fold formations. The fascination of these paintings is not primarily with the folds themselves though. Neither do they illustrate the fold's tendency to push the frame of painting towards the field of sculpture nor do they celebrate the multiplicity of its forms or the internal complexities of its curves. In short, there is no baroque drama happening here around the fold; it is flattened out by the style of the decidedly un-painterly paintings. Moreover, the motifs often produce an all over structure that counteracts the performance of the fold and redirects us to the painting's surface. As an effect of this flatness, the fascination is, at least initially, with the distortions the draperies produce in the original motifs: logos, Disney and anime characters, skulls, dragons, wolves, the virgin Mary, and the lettering of this show's title: *Orgy of the Sick* – all treated on one plane, all subjected to the same artistic operation. With all the awe onemight have for the painterly skills needed to produce this kind of realism, it is not least the spectacle of those distortions that holds the potential to immediately become sick content on Instagram.

*Circulation.* The paintings communicate with digital image culture not only in the sense that they are based on photographs Douglas takes with her smart phone – she takes hundreds of only one shirt, molded in different ways, until she gets a composition she finds satisfying – but also in the sense that they await their own being photographed and being shared on social media – which is also one of the most important contemporary forms of circulation for art as a commodity. Their measurements (210 x 160 cm) approximate the 4:3 ratio of the iPhone camera default setting. The movement of value in contemporary capitalism is an important theme not only regarding the subject of these paintings, but it also encompasses the paintings as objects themselves. Technically produced by Douglas' assistants – something that many contemporary painters employ as method without telling anyone –, these paintings don't make a claim on the authenticity of the painterly hand. To the contrary, they display technical skills that are, as Kant already knew, precisely not the decisive source of value when it comes to art. The art, here, is elsewhere. The actual paintings are exposed as the medium of an immaterial process that attaches itself to them. If it is a necessary illusion of commodity value to appear as property of the commodity itself, Douglas turns this illusionary character of value itself into the object of her art. This is demonstrated not least in the ways her paintings are installed in the exhibition spaces. Douglas dramatizes the material existence of the paintings as objects by hanging them on chains from the ceiling, signing their exposed backsides with a big black marker. It is the signature of a director of value dynamics as such.

-Juliane Rebentisch, 2021





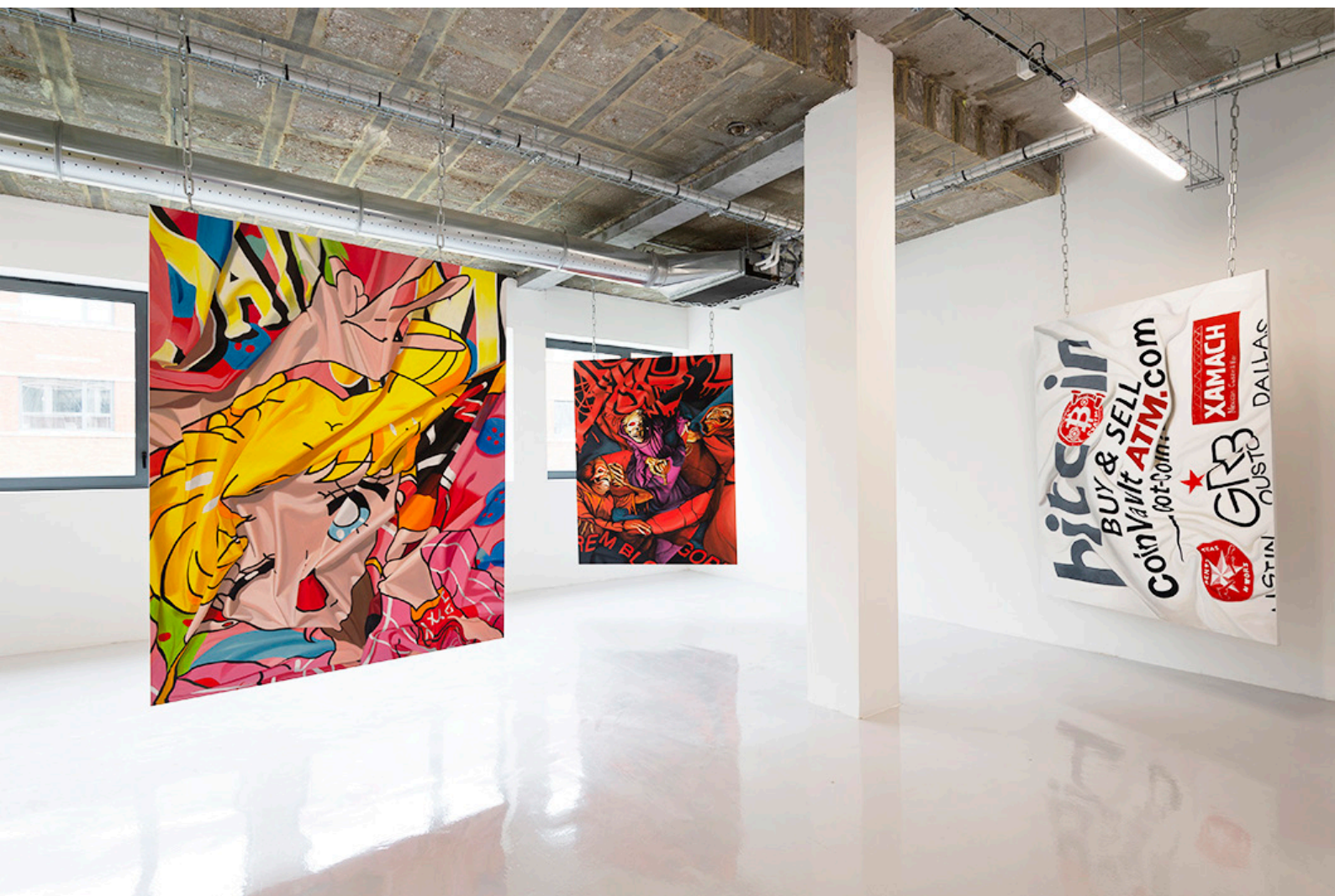
« Orgy of the Sick », Overduin & Co, Los Angeles, 2021





«Lord of the Fucking Wasteland», Air de Paris, Romainville, 2020





«Lord of the Fucking Wasteland», Air de Paris, Romainville, 2020



As well as being the title of Eliza Douglas's upcoming exhibition at Air de Paris, Lord of the Fucking Wasteland is the message you can read on one of the paintings on show. All the pictures in the exhibition are taken from photos of illustrated T-shirts.

Presuming that the Lord in question is to be taken as an alter ego of the artist herself, the «subjects» she rules over are the fictive inhabitants of this derelict territory: the subjects of paintings based on cropped photos of tees printed with zombies, vampires and superheroes. These paintings aren't «hers» in the sense of being pure products of her imagination, but rather in the sense of the garments being her personal property. The resultant paintings are a kind of sampling of her sculpture Pile (2019), recently shown at the Tate to accompany Anne Imhof's performance Sex: an enormous heap of T-shirts on the floor, with motifs including Kiss, kittens, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders.

In these new paintings the image is conditioned by the format, giving the impression that the shirts have been deliberately crumpled to make them match the frame. The measurements (210 x 160 cm) are very close to the traditional 4:3 photographic ratio – which is also the default setting on the iPhone camera Douglas uses for the pictures that serve as her source. This fit with the world of photography makes these proportions painting's new, secret geometry, with application of the ratio enabling symbolic incorporation into the picture of its current means of circulation and publicity in the form of digital photographs. Today the paintings go public on the social networks before being exhibited; as digital vignettes they are shown and swapped among amateurs and/or professionals before the opportunity arises for any physical encounter with their viewers (as is the case at present).

The style of the paintings is clear and sharp, in contrast with the actual image, which is distorted by the creases. The image gains in volume through the crumpling, but is then flattened (or ironed out) by the paint. The subject is an image on fabric, which is also the case of the painting – an image applied to canvas. In its own way the illustrated T-shirt is a portrait you wear, a way of projecting an intended self-image. This ground rule has been thoroughly integrated by the people in charge of clothes advertising and its habitual promise of an intimate connection between personal identity and product: «This garment is you», the ads endlessly encourage us to believe. Through a kind of metonymy clothing comes to represent the wearer.

Clothes are often spoken of as a seductive illusion, a kind of mask intended to create a good impression. But they can also – as is the case here – conjure up a shield, or a suit of armour. The image conveyed by the visual thematics of these paintings is one of harshness, but

also of abnormality, of a monstrosity that functions as a defence, a repellent – the antithesis, for example, of the T-shirt sporting a picture of a kitten more likely to trigger empathy. Another figure in one of the paintings is manga heroine Sailor Moon, equally monstrous in her embodiment of a supernatural humanity.

The insignificance of the subjects, the distension of the image via the folds, the total absence of painterly effects – all these factors contribute to an impression of triviality; but what is actually shown is somewhat disturbing in its evocation of a darkly menacing style of music or the deafening blare of a car race (one of the paintings is of a driver from the NASCAR Cup). We note in passing that «The Lord of the Wasteland» is a song by Toxic Holocaust; that one of the pictures is a copy of the cover of Death's album Scream Bloody Gore; and another that of Emperor's In the Nightside Eclipse. But whether the references are to specific album covers or a more generic imagery, the focus is systematically on the world of Heavy Metal and such subgenres as speed, thrash and death. A résumé, you might say, of NASCAR's stock-in-trade: more speed, plus accidents and – for the less fortunate competitors – extinction.

Back in the old days the painting repertoire was all but immutable, but since the advent of modernism artists have broadened their horizons with new subjects. Paradoxically, what is expected of art now is the unexpected. And what we're getting here is fucking unexpected. That a Death Metal group's T-shirt should find its way into a painting is as improbable now as the Impressionist apparition in the traditional art world of a concert in the Tuileries or a train pulling into a station.

- Vincent Pécoil, 2020





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





Untitled, 2020  
oil on canvas  
210 x 161 cm  
Unique





Overduin & Co., Los Angeles, 2019





Josh Smith, 2018  
oil on canvas, aluminum frame  
70 x 100 cm  
Unique





Josh Smith, 2019  
oil on canvas, aluminum frame  
120 x 151 cm  
Unique





Josh Smith, 2019  
oil on canvas  
120 x 151 cm  
Unique





Josh Smith, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
414 x 290 cm  
Unique





Eliza Douglas / Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo), Galerie Francesca Pia, 2019





Eliza Douglas / Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo), Galerie Francesca Pia, 2019





Window (Puppies Puppies 1), 2019  
oil on canvas  
140 x 110 cm  
unique





Window (Puppies Puppies 4), 2019  
oil on canvas  
140 x 110 cm  
unique





Window (Puppies Puppies 5), 2019  
oil on canvas  
140 x 110 cm  
unique





'Sex', The Art Institute Chicago, Chicago, 2019





Pile, 2019  
mixed media  
dimensions variable  
unique in a series





Jewish Museum, New York, 2018





My Gleaming Soul/ I am a Fireball", Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, 2017





How to Survive in this World, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 220 cm  
Unique





I am a Fireball, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
160 x 160 cm  
Unique





Old Tissues Filled with Tears, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
160 x 160 cm  
Unique





"Old Tissues Filled with Tears", Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 2017





Hello Love, 2016  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 175 cm  
Unique





Every Night, 217  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique





YouTube Videos of Exorcisms, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique





My Gleaming Soul, 6 1/2 Weeks, Museum Folkwang, Essen, 2017

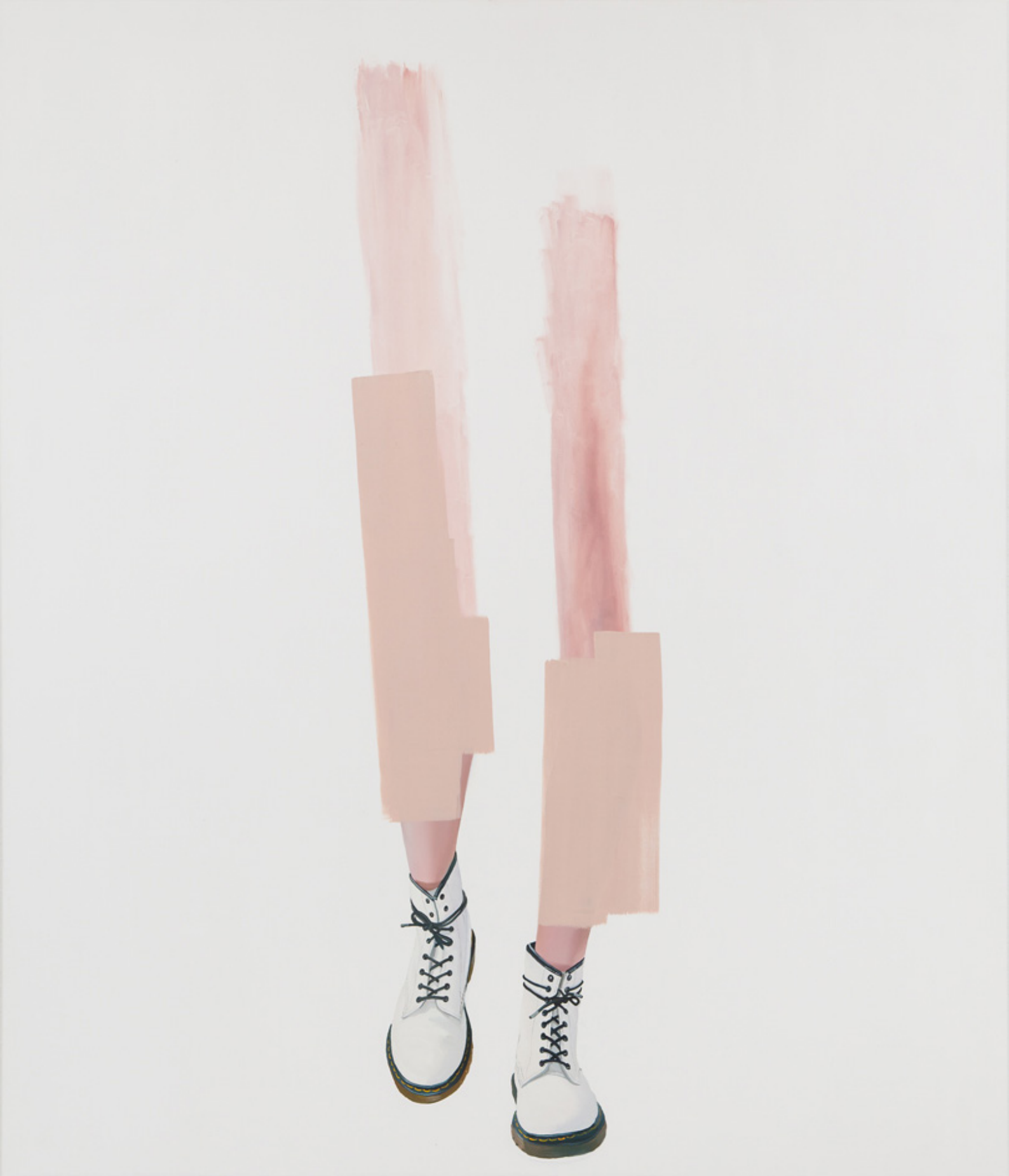
Eliza Douglas' large-format paintings captivate audiences with their distinctive style and a recurring theme: namely, the artist's hands. In her bold works, the artist focusses on naturalistically painted hands, as well as sometimes feet, on white backgrounds. These are executed in diverse and dynamic ways; Sometimes Douglas dissolves the limbs into loose, abstract brushstrokes from the wrists or ankles onwards, turning them into pure and simultaneously graphic painting which is in part reminiscent of Impressionist brushwork in terms of style or borrows from Abstract Expressionist techniques. Douglas combines representational and abstract painting by creating novel transitions from one to the next. The body may be lacking in these constellations, but is nevertheless conjured up by the reduced brushstrokes and the dynamic shape of the extremities, as a fragmented yet elastic anatomy. The artist's hands have been closely linked to creative work throughout art history. In Douglas' work the creative hands virtually dance around the absent body at the end of grotesquely long arms. Despite the paintings containing no clear references to other artists or explicitly contemporary themes, the hands seem to reference our current living reality, in which a connection to the digital world is made via the hands. Here, the body recedes while the hands explore ever new worlds through the keyboards and screens of digital interfaces. Sometimes multiple hands in Douglas' paintings create an entire network; they interact with and amongst themselves, creating a reflection of the immaterial connection via digital channels on her canvasses.

Douglas' works approach the creation of paintings through the application of paint with a brush in a highly innovative way. Her meta-paintings are one possible answer to the question of what painting can be in the 21st century.





My Gleaming Soul, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique



The Potential of Beings, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique









Evil is Banished, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 170 cm  
Unique





I Am the Horse you Should Bet On (I), 2016  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
Unique



I Am the Horse you Should Bet On (II), 2016  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
Unique





I Am the Horse you Should Bet On (A), 2016  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
Unique



I Am the Horse you Should Bet On (B), 2016  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
Unique





Eliza Douglas Anne Imhof, Galerie Buchholz, New York, 2017



A Piece of Fate, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique





Fruit Juice, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 180 cm  
Unique



I Am All Soul, Air de Paris, Paris, 2016



Is this a press release. I think not. It is an existence. The artist tells me they were born in 1984, an auspicious year, in New York, a commotional place and it is their first solo show. Currently they are living most of the year in Frankfurt because they are studying painting at the Staedelschule school and will complete that in 2017.

Though I've known this painter less than ten years but more than five I've always been aware of Eliza Douglas as a tall androgynous American female with a quietly radiant mission that's getting planned in the interior of them.

I, myself, was doing a gig at Staedelschule school last winter and since we are friends I went to Eliza Douglas's studio. They showed me a video they had made of the poet Dorothea Lasky who was reading her work and I think there may have been a trap door out of which the apparitional poet stepped out and declaimed. Maybe it is because I am a poet that I thought it but I felt that Dorothea Lasky was a devil stepping out of hell and I was very aware that Eliza Douglas had created the bright doorway through which the devil might come. And go. In Eliza's studio I thought about bodies and how they are mysterious, vanishing, chimerical, always surprising. As I write this my own body must be here but I am as free of it as I ever am right now. I wonder if Eliza Douglas thought of themselves as a super hero when they made this work.

I think of that comic-book character who elongated his arms at will, rescuing people, wrapping his stretchy limbs around a thief and making a smart remark like not so fast big guy. Comic super heroes are always both funny & noir, an American tone. Eliza's humble fantastic paintings don't strike me as particularly American work. They are as jokey like the poet springing out of the door because a painting historically is made by a hand and yet Eliza Douglas hired other painters to render the perfect Caucasian hands; perhaps a pair of frank feet also root her impossible and witty structure in the ground. The paint streak that Eliza Douglas makes next that is sprouting from the hands is genital in its muscular reach, a dumb fountain in the middle of the park portraying nothing but the ambition to spout water, passionately wondering if it is enough yet magical in its simplicity, in its enigmatic act: to be, and to deliberately appear as something human, a letter, deranged, but activated by a wish to put "hand" to paint. I can talk about one painting or all her paintings but whatever I do, they sizzle expectantly because these paintings are the youngest, coolest and the most antique. At once. What they've got is the wish to make art; unabashedly connecting this to that, employing the robotics of paint to start painting. These paintings make me want to laugh because they are all joy. They

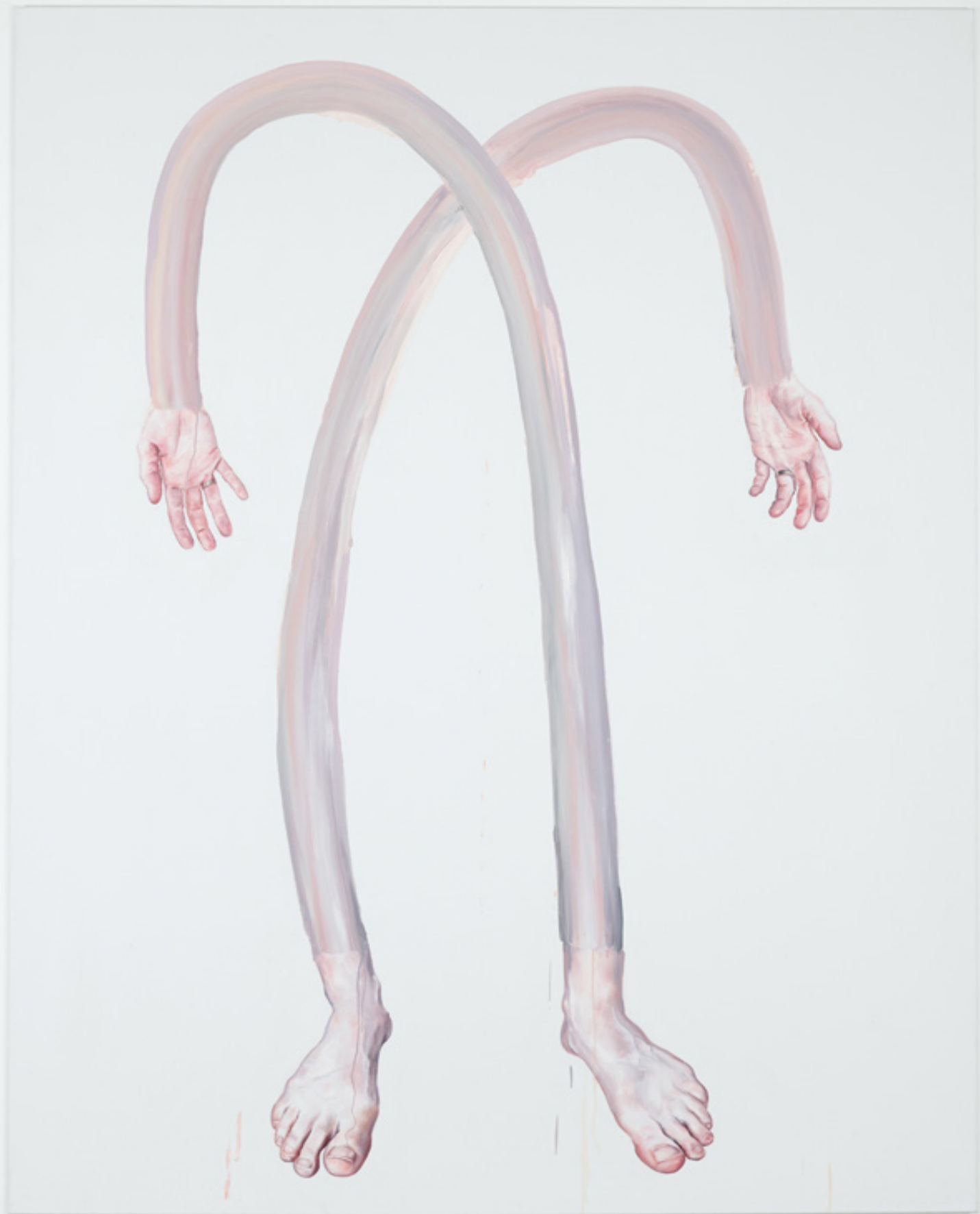
pulled it off, tricking the puppet of painting into coming alive again with so much less than you'd expect could do so much. It's good to be here. We are standing in Eliza Douglas's humble and iridescent new show. It is quest itself. It begins in the darkness of the cave and is waking up. Like the poet they are stepping out. All around the painter is day - a baby cries at the start but an adult laughs. I hear that laughter now. Yep they s-t-r-e-t-c-h and they're up. What a day!

- Eileen Myles



Strange Angels, 2016  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 165 cm  
Unique





I Am All Soul 2016  
Oil on canvas  
210 x 160 cm  
Unique