not by rejecting spectacle capitalism but by maximizing the visual pleasures that cutting-edge high-resolution screens can provide. Tabor Robak's overloaded field of colorful 3D blobs and Jacoby Satterwhite's baroque universe populated by vogueing dancers—both at Barclays Center—made the surrounding als feel limited and impoverished by their adherence to branding conventions.

Still, there's only so much of a break that a fleeting artwork can provide. While pausing the normal flow of advertisements, "Commercial Break" effectively offered a different sort of promotional platform, for the artists themselves. It was easy to miss the works in situ, but dramatic still images of them standing out against their contexts circulated on social media, tapping into the mythic indicator of success: having one's name in lights.

—William S. Smith

JORDAN KASEY
Nicelle Beauchene

In the fraught present, the endurance and perceived stability of past traditions can hold a surreal allure. The six excellent paintings in Jordan Kasey’s first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene (all 2017) convey a sense of surreal timelessness. The show’s title, “Exoplanet,” feels appropriate considering that the subjects portrayed in the paintings mimic cartilages but inhabit a neon-tinged alien world. Larger-than-life bodies that appear fashioned from clay push against the edges of the canvases. Built up in thick swaths of oil paint, the anonymous figures project an imposing air, largely due to the stony, carved-out quality of their features and the paintings’ confident scales (the smallest work is fifty-four inches square).

Four of the six paintings pertain solitary subjects engaged in everyday tasks, such as sitting down to a meal (At the Table) or rolling on the lawn (Backyard at Night). The single multi-figure piece, Poolside, demonstrates many of the artist’s formal techniques. The cagelike scene is filled with bulbous bodies. A narrow strip of unshaded blue represents a pool and serves as the only indication of a wider space. Composed with a limited red-and-pink palette, the limbs of the huddled group of swimmers have a weighty and heavily modeled presence. The upper bodies of two figures, one of whom sits on a bright yellow bench while the other stands behind it, are cut out of the frame. Two other swimmers sit on the ground, on either side of the painting. The one on the right has her back to us, while the one on the left faces the viewer, reaching out to absentmindedly graze the gray-tiled ground—a subtle, inscrutable gesture that serves as the painting’s focal point, the only hint of movement in a scene of sculptural stillness. Kasey adroitly contrasts intimacy with alienation throughout the paintings. This crowded example seems to bring the figures very close to us, without ever letting us in.

Practicing Piano depicts a gray figure—bent over, lips nearly kissing the keyboard—passionately playing the instrument. The painting is almost overwhelmingly personal. Yet everything about the figure remains ambiguous. Kasey’s oneric realism excludes signifiers for gender, race, and class, and any glimpses of individual identity. The inky black palette she used to render a figure sitting on the fluorescent green grass in Backyard at Night seems to impart little about race, but instead underscores the nonsensical nocturnal scene’s melancholic or reflective mood.

Kasey, who was born in 1985 and lives in New York, engages classical history in her work; the best formal historical parallel may be found in Picasso’s Interwar Classicist Period. The squad in Poolside could be descendants of the Pygmalion-esque women who inhabit Picasso’s Three Bathers (1921). Picasso’s classicizing aesthetic was part of a broader “return to order” in the wake of World War I, when many artists abandoned the extremes of the avant-garde in favor of seemingly timeless, traditional forms. In the 1920s, this shift provided the foundations for Surrealism, a revolt against rationalism and societal rules. Kasey’s static, alien view of the present, where scenes of intimacy are opaque and unsettling, is a welcome complication of returning and order, past and present, backward and forward.

—Julia Wolfsoff

MONICA BONVICINI
Mitchell-Innes & Nash

For this exhibition, the Italian-born, Berlin-based artist Monica Bonvicini bisected Mitchell Innes & Nash’s main space with a temporary wall supported by two small, dildolike “sculptures” in Murano glass resting on the floor. The installation, Structural Psychodrama #2 (2017), succinctly encapsulated the central theme of her work over the last twenty years: the imbrication of sex and architecture through relationships between the body and its shelters, barriers, props, and frames. As Bonvicini put it in a 2004 interview, “You have something under your belt and something over your head. And you need both.”

The central wall, left conspicuously bare, served primarily as an obstruction, blocking the viewer’s movement through the space as well as the sightlines between the exhibition’s other works. At first, I didn’t recognize it as an artwork at all: fitted seamlessly between the building’s existing structural columns, the pristine white wall running down the middle of the gallery seemed to suggest an in-
When Bonvicini began working in the 1990s, her frank engagement with fetishism and BDSM—particularly as a female artist—carried a far more transgressive charge than it does today. What I found most unsettling in this show wasn’t the leather, cocks, and chains, but the mural, with its anonymizing gaze at day laborers dwarfed by layers of brick. Many of Bonvicini’s most notorious works have explored a libidinal investment in construction: the video installation Wallfuckin’ (1995) features a nude woman grinding against the edge of a wall; for What Does Your Wife/ Girlfriend Think of Your Rough and Dry Hands (1999), she surveyed construction workers with questions about the erotics of their profession. But now when I think of a man building a big, beautiful wall, I am not aroused, but terrified.

—Rachel Wetzler

SANDRO CHIA
Marc Straus

For his first exhibition of paintings in New York in nearly a decade, Italian artist Sandro Chia offered a rather overt reflection on his life, albeit one delivered in the painterly and metaphorical terms for which he is known. Now seventy, Chia was once a bad boy of the Transavanguardia, which included like-minded compatriots such as Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Luigi Ontani, and Carlo Maria Pisanelli. He polarized the art world of the late 1970s and ’80s. Transavanguardia not only reintroduced figurative painting into the predominantly Minimalist and Conceptual scene of the period, but proposed devices like allegory and mythology as valid strategies in contemporary art discourse, much to the chagrin of the art-world establishment at the time. For better or worse, the group helped instigate the art-market boom of subsequent years.

EXHIBITION REVIEWS