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Review: 'Unreasonable Sized Paintings' at SVA Chelsea Gallery

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What makes a great art show? Surely, the formula of great curator + great artist(s) + great concept is necessary, all elements "Unreasonable Sized Paintings" and "Reasonable Size Paintings" can check off. Phong Bui, known for his 15 year helm at the Brooklyn Rail, brings together Lois Dodd, Alex Katz, Joanne Pousette-Dart, Tal R, Terry Winters, Lisa Yuskavage, and others to consider the psychological condition of scale that can provide a space for both intimacy and monumentality in a two-part show at SVA's Chelsea Gallery and Mana Contemporary. Its conceptual impetus comes from Jackson Pollock's admiration of Albert Pinkham Ryder and Thomas Nozkowski's standout line that identified "reasonable sized" in a 2007 John Yau-moderated panel discussion at the magazine's headquarters in Greenpoint. But there's something else, some sleights of mind, that makes a show stand out in this Gotham city, a bed of "greats" canoodling with one another. And this show has it. Perhaps what makes it great is the rejection of the trend for oversized, overbearing works by artists desperately trying to stand apart by being the loudest in the room. So, we encourage you to head over to the 15th floor gallery at Chelsea's Starrett Lehigh building to get a taste of what is essentially a magical showing of works, some of which we're sure you have never seen, all of which are neither studies nor serial, and most of which you could fit under your arm. Bui shared what he dubs as "haiku descriptions" of three artists in the show.



Robert Feintuch, "Fat Hercules," 2011, polymer emulsion on honeycomb panel. Courtesy of the artist, SVA, New York and Mana Contemporary, New Jersey.

"Robert Feintuch's treatment of figure is a precarious representation of human movement that reveals as much vulnerability and caustic humor as it does affection for such a condition. By constructing a singular image that refers to himself (self-portraiture) as well as an imaginary person, he never fails to maximize his liberty to create forms that lie between modeling and flatness, a result of his equal investment in abstraction and representation. Ultimately, purity and impurity of form, spirituality and laity, humor and restraint, strength and weakness, among other opposites, all co-exist simultaneously."