



Ena Swansea, *It's Morning Already?*, 2014. Oil on graphite on canvas, 60 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Friedman Benda Gallery. Photo: Christopher Burke

Ena Swansea hasn't been seen in a solo exhibition in New York City since 2007, although in the interim her career has flourished with exhibitions in Germany, Luxembourg, Seoul, Philadelphia (her fall outing at Locks Gallery was covered by The Review Panel Philadelphia) and a major project at a bullring in Spain. (She also features in the exhibition "Come Like Shadows," curated by this writer at Zürcher Studio, on view through February 23.) The extensive show of her paintings together with a prototype design of a pair of sofas at Friedman Benda, therefore, now in its snow-gripped final days, is a chance to take note of the progress and productivity of one of the more eccentric painterly realists active today.

Cohen, David. "Night and Day: Ena Swansea, Reversible," *artcritical*. February 14, 2014.

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Ena Swansea, *Go Go Dancers*. Oil on graphite on linen, 96 x 36 inches. Courtesy of Friedman Benda Gallery. Photo: Christopher Burke Studio

Overlapping with strong recent showings of artists Lois Dodd, Yvonne Jacquette, Alex Katz and Philip Pearlstein, it is possible to think of Swansea as an extension of New York School perceptual realism into a pop-synthetic arena. Working from photography and imagination, as well as remembered perception, Swansea brings sheer delight at the potential of expressive marks and manipulated materials to depict actual if quirky scenes and forms. Her mode is especially well suited to realms of darkness and artifice—this can be lights shining at night on stumps in the Hudson or banks of snow in Central Park, works which most closely recall Katz as well as fellow Katzians Robert Berling and Peter Doig, such as *It's Morning Already?* (2014), shown in a black-walled interior gallery. But her painterly subterfuges (brushy silken strokes atop layers of liquid graphite) seem especially suited to internal nocturnes – nightlife, crowded bars and cabarets and more louche entertainments. It is as if her sleights of brushstroke, in turn brazen and furtive, gravitate instinctually towards libido and inebriation. The slippery, bronzed flesh of the androgynous performer closest to the viewer in *Go Go Dancers*, (2013) seems to melt into the mottled background like celluloid catching fire, frangible at the very moment of allure, as if scorched by our own voyeuristic gaze.

A coincidence of former day jobs might be said to condition her artistic personality. Swansea, who is from North Carolina, trained in photojournalism and first worked in TV news. Once she had determined to be a painter she supported herself through high-end interior décor painting – think ragroll cloudscares in corporate lobbies. These day jobs are emblematic of the extremes that reconcile in Swansea's supercharged dualistic visions with their headline motifs and fetish finishes. A natural for

extending her painting interests into sites of luxury and invention, when she was invited to exhibit by Friedman Benda, a gallery with a special interest in the decorative arts, she did so on condition of collaborating with them on a long-cherished furniture idea. Her serpentine *Night and Day Reversible Sofa*, (2014) has reversible cushions in sumptuous synthetic white fur on the daylight recto, somewhat kinky in

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purity but nonetheless contrastive with the prints from details of her own paintings, (including *Strawberry*, of Nastassja Kinski in Tess on view in “Come Like Shadows”) on the after hours verso.



Ena Swansea, *Night and Day Reversible Sofa*. Steel, auto body paint, burlap, fake fur, feathers, and computerized reproductions of paintings, on dye-sublimation casino gaming suede. 35.25 x 157 x 33.5 inches. Courtesy of Friedman Benda Gallery. Photo: Christopher Burke Studio

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