

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Art in review, from Times critics. FEB. 11, 2016



"Swag Swag Krew" (from "The Out and Bad Series," 2011-14) by Ebony G. Patterson. Credit: Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Illinois; Butcher Walsh, Museum of Arts and Design

Ebony G. Patterson, 'Dead Treez'

By Holland Cotter

In the expansive 2012 exhibition "Caribbean: Crossroads of the World," a few works instantly stood out. One was a painting by Ebony G. Patterson of a bust-length head of ambiguous gender, with a long dark neck, a dead-white face and glitter-encrusted sunglasses.

Although intensely stylized, the painting depicted something specific: the fashionable contemporary Jamaican dancehall culture that blurs sexual distinctions, encourages sartorial extravagance and favors skin bleached to catch the light of ever-present video cameras. Ms. Patterson, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1981 and teaches at the University of Kentucky, now has a smashing solo show, "Dead Treez," at the Museum of Arts and Design —

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originally organized by Karen Patterson (no relation) for the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wis. — that returns to the dancehall milieu and deepens her take on it.

An opening tableau of 10 male mannequins dressed in riotously patterned finery sets the mood. They look like visitors from another world, though whether that world is benign or diabolical, a realm of the living or of the dead, is unclear. They introduce the show's main attraction, a set of monumental tapestries, laid flat on the floor like carpets, their embroidered surfaces sparkling with sequins and dense with sewn-on objects: plastic toy guns, silk flowers, schoolbooks, shoes and eyeglasses. Partly visible under the layers of appliqué are life-size photographic images, lifted from social media, of Jamaican murder victims, evidence of a violence that haunts a country still brutalized by postcolonial instability, and of a darkness that dancehall glamour overlays like a bright, leaking bandage.

The theme of beauty disguising rot extends to a smaller adjoining show that Ms. Patterson has organized from the museum's permanent collection. The material she has chosen to work with is contemporary jewelry, including some bizarre examples — a multifinger ring that looks like a set of brass knuckles; a necklace made of handgun triggers; a sterling silver police badge — and set them in vitrines filled with fake tropical vegetation and carnivorous-looking flowers. The result, as in the florid tapestries, is a vision of a nightmare Eden in which this brilliant young artist is the master gardener.

Museum of Arts and Design
2 Columbus Circle, Manhattan
Through April 3