



HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

Collaged Paintings with Presence

Dona Nelson's works are literally made to stand up for themselves, bolted to wooden platforms and staged in coterie of pictorial bodies.



Seph Rodney

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models stand close to the paintings, installation view (all images courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery and the artist; all photos by Adam Reich)

Dona Nelson stole the title to her current solo exhibition, *models stand close to the paintings*. It originally appeared in a 1951 *Vogue* magazine spread, in which Jackson Pollock's work served as a design backdrop for the shoot. Here, Nelson takes the opposite tack: Her double-sided, collaged paintings take up space and have a presence akin to that of other people.

The works are literally made to stand up for themselves, bolted to wooden platforms and staged in coteries of pictorial bodies. I had a moment in the gallery of experiencing them as I do other people in the wash of mass transit, when I caught a glimpse of one of the "Passenger" (2016) pieces (a sitting man in gray trousers, a black jacket, and dark glasses) *through* one of the "By the Yard" (2016) pieces.

The work is consistently varied in terms of materials, colors, and style of construction — the latter being the most fascinating to me. There's scrunched-up cheesecloth, muslin, and drawing used to form the figures, but some bodies are rounded and amorphous, while others are blocky compositions of squares of color or rectangles of black that imply a body but leave the figuration as only a suggestion of the complete form.



Dona Nelson, "Platform" (2017), collage, dyed cheesecloth, muslin, and acrylic on linen mounted on plywood base, 81.5 x 36 in.; base: 74 x 22 in.



Dona Nelson, "Platform" (2017), (reverse side), collage, dyed cheesecloth, muslin, and acrylic on linen mounted on plywood base, 81.5 x 36 in.; base: 74 x 22 in.

The exhibit includes an embedded [Youtube video](#) of the artist talking about the work. In it, she says she likes the mix of illusion

and physicality that also happens with real bodies. Yes — that preference comes through. Like other people’s faces and forms, some of these resolved the closer I got; others needed more distance for their features to cohere. Many still remain strangers that I’ve only met in passing, but one or two reminded me of an old teacher or uncle, and with them, I spent more time.



models stand close to the paintings, installation view

[models stand close to the paintings](#) continues at [Thomas Erben gallery](#) (526 West 26th Street, 4th floor, Chelsea) through May 6.

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