

JACK HANLEY GALLERY

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ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, MARTHA SCHWENDENER, KAREN ROSENBERG and WILL HEINRICH DEC. 15, 2016



"A Pale Flickering" by Nikki Maloof. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Hanley Gallery.

NIKKI MALOOF

Through Dec. 18. Jack Hanley, 327 Broome Street, Manhattan; 646-918-6824, jackhanley.com.

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Ms. Maloof takes a nocturnal view of the animal world, as the show's title suggests, but it is also culled from comics and animation. Her anthropomorphic menagerie includes tigers, dogs, cats, monkeys, bats and insects (or apparent versions of these), painted in acid yellows and greens, and the orange and purple of an illuminated night. (Her "Starry Night" nods to van Gogh, but it is a window screen fixed with bugs rather than a celestial display.) Expressive and thoughtful, the animals in Ms. Maloof's paintings clearly conjure humans, just as two canvases featuring a blank-eyed blond woman suggest a slinking, silent animal.

In past centuries, animals in art represented many things, from religious faith to political affiliations. Ms. Maloof's mirror the popularity of animals on social media, where, despite disagreements on virtually every other topic, we can usually reach consensus on cute animal antics or admire cross-species friendships. These serve as utopian models for humans, of course. And while Ms. Maloof doesn't make any grand claims in her paintings, her subjects' goofy, uncanny expressions and psychological states suggest a post-human (and postelection) art world in which animals seem purer, more attractive and sympathetic than we do.

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