

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Ceramic sculptures; warped photographs; floral still lifes; treasures in a trash collection; and swoops of acrylic indigo.



Installation view of "Simone Fattal: Works and Days" at MoMA PS1, which is Ms. Fattal's first solo museum exhibition in the United States.

Simone Fattal and Balice Hertling, Karma International, kaufmann repetto, and Galerie Tani; via MoMA PS1; Matthew Septimus

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Simone Fattal

Through Sept. 2. MoMA PS1, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, Queens; 718-784-2084, momaps1.org.

The Lebanese artist Simone Fattal seems to make small ceramic sculptures the way some artists dash off fast, skillful sketches. There's a sense of intoxicating speed and wry pleasure in their loose, sometimes clumsy forms and usually bright uneven surfaces. Like the best drawn sketches, these works also have an uncanny accuracy in their approximations of the real world. The colorful parade of 170 pieces, made from 1988 to 2019 dominating "Works and Days," Ms. Fattal's sumptuous, and first, solo museum exhibition in the United States, conveys a strong sense of ancient cultures, recent wars, personal memory and the erosions of time.

Many forms — which include damaged houses, abandoned walls in deserts and limbless tree trunks — suggest ruins or relics, as perhaps befits an artist who lived in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war, before decamping to California in 1980. Some titles establish meaning, for example, identifying with bitter irony a pile of small glazed gun-like sticks in a possible Quonset hut as "Weapons of Mass Destruction," or imbuing cursory figures with the weight of myth, as in "Agamemnon," "Siren," "Visitation," or "Warrior." Other titles simply confirm what the eye may already suspect, as with "Lion," "Ziggurat," "Turtle" or "Window."

Organized by Ruba Katrib, curator at MoMA PS1, this show includes paintings dating back to 1969, some of which, like "Submerged Landscape" (1969) are excellent, and several consistently convincing groups of works on paper. Among the best are five large collages dated 2011 to 2016, whose intricate arrays of images teem with the cultural references and personal experiences that Ms. Fattal's sculptures so effortlessly synthesized. **ROBERTA SMITH**