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SOHO

Darja Bajagic and Lionel Maunz

Through Dec. 3. Downs & Ross, 424 Broadway, Manhattan; 646-741-9138, downsross.com.



Left, Darja Bajagic's painting "Baptism by Blood (Mother & Child)" (2022). Right, Lionel Maunz's "My Hands Make the Perfect Wound" (2022). via Darja Bajagic, Lionel Maunz and Downs & Ross, New York; Photo by Phoebe d'Heurle

With the grim flare of a modernist, Lionel Maunz brutalizes the human figure; like a millennial surfing an internet of atrocities, Darja Bajagic cuts the macabre with irony. Bajagic, born in 1990, pings between Moldova and Chicago, while Maunz, 1975, lives in Brooklyn — but their sensibilities rhyme. Each of the four Maunz sculptures on view in the show "Forest Passage" at Downs & Ross has a Bajagic painting behind it, so that one can't escape the other. Bajagic's "Baptism by Blood (Mother & Child)" depicts a priest's frock and hands on a liturgical book, giving the hands holding hunks of muscle in Maunz's sculpture "My Hands Make the Perfect Wound" a sacramental aura. Bajagic frames her work with the same kind of welded steel stock that Maunz uses for his armatures — their formal sympathy and shared restraint chill the subject matter to the point of reverence.

This ambivalence between schlock shock and mortal meditation makes it difficult to say what you're feeling — awed, affronted, or only sick. Maunz's covers his hairless or burnt-looking animal forms in brush strokes, so that they appear fuzzy, gestural and artificial — rather than waxy and transubstantiated like one of Paul Thek's "meat" works. The leftmost Bajagic painting, a trapezoidal picture of a group burial, has the noncommittal wit of a Warhol electric chair. In the company of Maunz's mute slaughterhouse, Bajagic's crypto-occultic wall hangings seem somber — and yet, their burlap surfaces are stitched up with embalmer's thread: if you can stomach the thought, it's almost funny. TRAVIS DIEHL