

rachel uffner

New
American
Paintings

EXCAVATING THE FIGURE WITH BIANCA BECK

by Brian Fee

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It is remarkable what a single gestural stroke or gouged marking can do towards turning a murkily colored abstract painting into something uncannily figurative, erotic, *mortal* even. In a long New York weekend, I knew I had to see Bianca Beck's solo exhibition, the appropriately titled [Body](#), at Rachel Uffner Gallery. I'd been taken by her inclusion in Joe Fyfe's curated [Le Tableau](#) exhibition at Cheim & Read last summer, a cross-generational survey beginning with post-war European *Art Informel* action painters like Jean Fautrier and Hans Hartung and featuring contemporary responses. Beck wasn't just among the youngest voices in the show, but her small-scale oil on incised wood panel work *Baby* was as intuitively aligned, and breathlessly enlivening, as the original *Art Informel* group. This new grouping of mixed media works and first-time sculpture finds Beck channeling that vivacity even further. - *Brian Fee, Austin Contributor*



Bianca Beck | *Untitled*, 2011, oil on canvas, 20" x 16". Courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York.

That term "erotic" from before was deliberate. Thanks to Beck's convention of rarely titling her works (her debut solo exhibition at [White Columns](#) included just three with titles), plus their respective abstractness, she purposefully encourages interpretation. Yet considering the exhibition's title *Body*, I've little doubt the figure itself (or the remnants of her gestural, physical presence in executing the works) exists in them. I was drawn significantly to *Untitled*, a sooty panel of somber oils and ink with an abraded surface, featuring raised fragments near the top and, centrally lower down, a section of scorched-off wood furrowed out like a human navel. Dead serious. Despite the panel's splintery medium, this "navel" and its outlying, erogenous area seemed softened, even channeling the sensuality of a Surrealist cropped

nude. This *Untitled* was impetus for me to study closely its neighbors, like the spare oil on canvas speckled with half-inch diagonal rips and colored by a brushy mauve stain. Yet here, beginning near the top right and sauntering through the lower left quadrant before evaporating, is a single, curving black brushstroke, like the swell of a pregnant belly, or the closely cropped detail of the body.

Rachel Uffner Gallery
170 Suffolk Street
New York, NY 10002

+1 212 274 0064
info@racheluffnergallery.com
racheluffnergallery.com

Beck sticks to a dense palette throughout, her so-called “body colors” of red, brown and black, besides a richly toned violet canvas with lighter striations evoking legs. Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas Series* echoes in both Beck’s coloration and performative resonance of the works — as if the brushwork residues were newly applied — plus their subtly pronounced attractiveness. That matted grass and mud, even blood and burning earth could channel Mendieta’s own essence and mortality, and more broadly our own, recurs in Beck’s scratched, charred abuse, balancing human suppleness with an almost violently physical process. It seems appropriate she would experiment with sculpture, revealing several wood blocks inundated with paint and astonishingly visceral, in the vein of Paul Thek or Berlinde de Bruyckere. Though they’re extensions of Beck’s painterly style, their mass presents more possibilities for experimenting with abstracted form, only heightened by their brutally corporeal three dimensions. The pun’s intentional, but Beck is carving out a unique niche for herself in small-scale abstraction, emphasizing the work’s execution as strongly as the end result.

Bianca Beck was born in Columbus, OH in 1979 and lives and works in New York, NY. She has shown in group exhibitions in Chicago, Detroit, New York and in Madrid, and had her first solo exhibition at White Columns in New York, NY. Body, her second solo exhibition and her first at Rachel Uffner Gallery, runs through Dec 23.

Brian Fee is an art punk currently based in Austin, TX. His culture blog [Fee's List](#) covers his three loves (art, film and live music) occurring in his other three loves (the Lone Star State, the Big Apple, and Tokyo).



Bianca Beck | *Body*, installation view. Courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York