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Art We Saw This Winter

From our critics, reviews of closed gallery shows around New York City.

Words by Max Lakin
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Brutality and tenderness commingle in the Hungarian artist Eva Beresin's new paintings in her show "Aktenkundig (On Record)," which depict versions of herself and her family in scenes that clamor with both visual and emotional intensity. Rendered in a childlike hand and juicy palette that belies their gravity, Beresin's pictures can feel fantastical, less surreal than the way anxieties tend to fall over one another in dreams, letting the mind sort them out, or not. Beresin often depicts herself naked, tumbling through space, à la Chagall. Soldiers are as likely to intrude as garden gnomes, ghosts are given equal status with art-historical allusions. Gloopy 3D-printed sculptures of melted dogs and turtles, as though escaped from the picture plane, amplify the allegorical mood.

Beresin's current mode of figurative painting follows from discovering the diary her mother wrote after her liberation from Auschwitz. Despite that subject matter, or perhaps because of it, Beresin's canvases brim with caustic humor ("Familiarity," in which a woman surveys her aging body as cosmonauts leer from the corner), indebted to but not weighed down by the freight of memory.

Beresin works fast, applying paint to canvas on the floor without any intermediary sketching. (Tread marks from her shoes are often visible, like a faint map, revealing the traces of her movements.) Her fleshy, muddy figures are often barely legible, sometimes heaped into clots of roughly defined bodies, which suggest mass graves and other attendant horrors of the camps, an inherited trauma that reverberates. Her furious strokes read as impatience, but also freedom.

