

# ARTFORUM

## Katherine Bernhardt

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

980 Madison Avenue, 3rd Floor

September 9–October 24

Katherine Bernhardt first gained notice for her drippy portraits of supermodels, which, like the paintings of some of her contemporaries in figuration—Sophie von Hellermann and Chantal Joffe, say—ply aggressively unfussy paint. Bernhardt has lately been forgoing cover girls for eye candy of a different sort: brightly colored patterns and funky groupings of foodstuffs and commodities, with Doritos, toilet-paper rolls, cigarettes, and tube socks making repeated appearances. In this exhibition, that Kmart cartful of stuff gets mixed up with fluorescent-hued flora and fauna of the Caribbean, specifically Puerto Rico, where she recently completed a residency. Bernhardt's acrylic-and-spray-paint palette conjures all the colors of a bowl of Froot Loops, contrasting with the drab burlap overlay on the gallery floor—emptied coffee sacks containing a few stray beans, which occasionally crunch underfoot—that rounds out the tropical ambience and aroma.



View of “Katherine Bernhardt: Pablo and Efrain,” 2015.

Shunning linear perspective, Bernhardt paints her strange aggregations (of sea turtles, hammerhead sharks, and toucans, among others) in nonoverlapping, all-over compositions in schematic profile view, suggesting an exuberantly garbled page of botanical illustrations or natural curiosities. But unlike carefully limned scientific representations, Bernhardt's paintings feature sloppy, luminous strokes in service of a highly pleasurable visual nuttiness. In *Sharks, Plantains, and Cigarettes* (all works 2015), for example, the ash topping the cigarettes billows out laterally, forming demented, windblown toupees, and bunches of hanging plantains look like menacing Day-Glo claws. While most of the canvases are vast in scale, one of the smallest works, *Cantaloupe and Toilet Paper, Café Mallorca*, distills Bernhardt's sprezzatura nicely: The fruit-juice puddles of orange paint in the background nearly camouflage the magisterial bronze spray paint that outlines the abject rolls of toilet paper—a perfectly lyrical crudeness. Bernhardt knows just when to put the brush down, laugh, and call it a day.

— Claire Lehmann

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