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Weekend Arts



2014 JEAN DUBUFFET ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK-ADAGP, PARIS/ACQUAVELLA GALLERIES

Jean Dubuffet's 1950 "Tête de Héros" ("Hero's Head").

'Dubuffet/Barceló'

Acquavella Galleries
18 East 79th Street, Manhattan
Through next Friday

This pairing of the postwar Art Brut leader Jean Dubuffet and the contemporary Spanish painter Miquel Barceló is predictably unbalanced but nonetheless stimulating. It includes a fantastic selection of Dubuffets from the 1940s and '50s, among them his richly marbled "Texturologies" and earthy portrait heads — all of which make for an excellent prologue to the Museum of Modern Art's fall exhibition "Jean Dubuffet: Soul of the Underground."

Dubuffet's "Tête de Héros" ("Hero's Head," 1950) and "Tête Envahie de Fluids" ("Head Filled With Fluids," 1951) present the head as a flat, gelatinous blob — a protozoan under a microscope, perhaps. In mid-1950s works like "Riches Vaisselles" ("Rich Dishes"), fossil-like hints of the figure emerge from heavily knifed and scraped grounds. And in the fully

abstract "Texturologies" of the late 1950s, Abstract Expressionist drips, à la Pollock, are buried under thin, glassy layers, as if glimpsed through sheets of ice.

Against Dubuffet's restless, searching paintings, Mr. Barceló's works feel utterly formulaic. A conservatism creeps through, even when he uses unorthodox techniques, as when he paints conventional-looking portraits with bleach, chalk and charcoal on canvas, or makes insipid monochromes with strips of polyvinyl acetate coated thickly in titanium pigment. The exception is "Huitres II" ("Oysters II") from 1988, in which a creamy ground appears scarred by scattered little C-cuts with raised flaps.

In a quotation on the wall, Mr. Barceló discusses his fascination with Dubuffet's writings, which "read like culinary recipes with jam, butter, boiled-down ingredients, etc." You sense a literary interest not really expressed in paint — or, at any rate, not in these paintings.

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