Ewing, Margaret. “Janaina Tschape." *Artforum*, November 2021.

Hugh Hayden, *Good Hair 2*, 2021, wooden desk, Tampico, nylon, epoxy, 33½ × 24 × 27". From the series “Good Hair,” 2021.

spinning wheel acknowledged the central role of cotton, while an antiquated chair recalled the plantation. Scrupulously handcrafted by Hayden, *Lincoln Logs* resembled a cabin constructed from the eponymous building blocks, which were invented a century ago. The toy originally came with instructions on how to build dwellings that belonged to both the slavery-abolishing president Abraham Lincoln and the literary Uncle Tom, a figure who has become shorthand in African American vernacular for “a sellout.” This idea of racial compromise and economic success rippled through other work. *Uncle Phil* is a gavel named after the avuncular judge from the 1990s sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, a humorous take on class tensions between urban and suburban African Americans. An uncanny replica of a gourmet chocolate bar, *To be titled*, was carefully ensconced in its half-open wrapper, which reads “100% COCOA.” *110% Cocoa*, a slanted door whose inset panels mimic the chocolate bar’s grid, leaned next to it. The visual distortion and the numerical excess of its title seem to parody the desire for an authentic Blackness. *Talented and Gifted/Passing*, a conjoined pair of school desks, dramatized this tension. The left one, sculpted from lighter sapwood, leans back, winning a tug-of-war against the one on the right, made from the more familiar black heartwood. Visualizing a hierarchy based on skin tone, it questions whether achievement and success truly shield one from racial prejudice. Emphasizing ebony’s many subtle hues, these disparate objects brilliantly complicated any monolithic view of Blackness.

Though mostly invisible in the final work, some unconventional materials were mentioned in the checklist: cocoa butter, Gatorade, Neosporin, Tiger Balm, tung oil. Many are restorative substances, providing nourishment and healing to an exhausted or injured body. If Hayden’s sculptures may be read as metonyms for the African American body, then the gesture of anointing them with such emollients quietly acknowledges the heroic effort and debilitating cost of growing up Black in America.

—Murtaza Vali

Janaina Tschäpe

SEAN KELLY GALLERY

Symphonic constellations of velvety color swirled over and through the six paintings in Janaina Tschäpe’s solo exhibition here. Immediately commanding attention, they constituted the artist’s response to the drama of nature as experienced during the pandemic lockdowns, first in the countryside near São Paulo, and then in the Hudson Valley in upstate New York. Whereas the theme of the elements has run through much of her art, these works, alongside seven accompanying drawings, departed from earlier allusions to the lushness and beauty of the outdoors in favor of a focus on its power, in particular the fugitive line between might and menace.

In an exceptional example of the consequence of materials, Tschäpe introduced oil sticks in combination with oil pastels, ushering a new assertiveness into her engagement with the canvas. Compared to earlier abstractions in water-based paints, here the monumental *Between Veils of Blue and Grey, a Forest* (all works cited, 2021), which stretched nearly twenty-eight feet across, featured an oily fathomless black that effected dramatic high contrast against lighter shades of gray. Nearby, a smaller and sparer painting titled *Pale Yellow Summer* emanated a simultaneously meditative yet fierce stillness, its underlayers of gray and blue pastels heightened by additions of black and forest green.

Painting has grown more dominant in Tschäpe’s recent shows, but this new direction is less a departure from her lens-based work—often sensuous portrayals of female bodies in the landscape—and more of a return. She started out as a painter and in a 2018 interview described moving away from her initial focus after earning a BFA from Hamburg’s Hochschule für bildende Künste in 1997 (she went on to receive an MFA from New York’s School of Visual Arts the following year). “I seemed to be losing myself too much in painting,” said Tschäpe. “I couldn’t control it, and I couldn’t get the distance I felt was needed. Film and photography taught me how to step back.” In this, the artist’s third exhibition of paintings in New York and her second at this gallery—staged a month after her midcareer survey at the Sarasota Art Museum in Florida—her engagement with line, color, and gesture, and the adoption of oils that unlocked added expression, showed her firmly in command of the medium.

Tschäpe grew up between Brazil and Germany, and ways of conceptualizing the world in both countries inform her practice. In making the new paintings while an out-of-control virus was spreading, the artist drew on German Romanticism as a way of entering into a relationship with this lethal aspect of nature’s power. Approaching the canvas with a feeling and then translating that into a color, she worked in a lineage developed around the primacy of emotional experience that emerged in the Sturm und Drang movement of the eighteenth century and deepened during the nineteenth century with high Romanticism. The sumptuously colored *Blue Moon*, with its pulsating field of cool-toned lines that nearly consumes a luminous wine-colored background, suggested an encounter with the sublime. It hinted at the proximity of the overwhelming to pleasure—passages of rusty brown further unsettled an otherwise soothing palette. Tschäpe’s paintings

Janaina Tschäpe, *Blue Moon*, 2021, casein, oil stick, and oil pastel on canvas, 9' 8" × 12' 11".

captured the psychological unease of this time, when a raging pandemic and an off-kilter climate have confirmed the natural world's dominance over whatever power and agency we imagined ourselves to have.

—*Margaret Ewing*

Michael Dean

ANDREW KREPS

Turner-nominated artist Michael Dean, a soft-spoken and sweary Geordie sculptor in his mid-forties, considers himself, above all else, a writer. Typically angular, vaguely anthropomorphized forms made from everyday construction materials such as concrete, corrugated metal, and plywood, his installations develop from his impulse to transform the solitary experience of putting words on a page into something that you can walk around and touch. On the main floor of Dean's first exhibition at Andrew Kreps, nine freestanding concrete-and-steel sculptures were arranged across the length of the gallery like a series of waxing and waning moons. (The lunar installation was perhaps explicated by the show's title, "A Thestory of Luneliness for Fuck Sake," which contains a portmanteau of "loneliness" and "lune." The latter term, taken from plane geometry, denotes a crescent figure bounded by two circular arcs.) Coarse yet vulnerable, like the desiccated body of a seahorse, each sculpture was created to resemble a warped variation on that omnipresent symbol for happiness: the smiley face. Given titles like *Unfucking Titled Tear* and *Unfucking Titled Cope* (all works 2021), the pieces were made even more intriguing by the items they were garlanded with: a bike chain, crushed soda cans, a burnt book, bright-yellow caution tape reading FUCK SAKE and BLESS, and a plastic shopping bag on which the iconic sans serif THANK YOU was replaced by I LOVED YOU I LOVED YOU I LOVED YOU.

View of "Michael Dean," 2021. From left: *Unfucking Titled Poor [Verso]*, 2021; *Unfucking Titled Free*, 2021; *Unfucking Titled Free*, 2021.

Although indebted to language, Dean's art is perfectly uncongenial to the written word. This was emphasized by a splayed-open dictionary propped against one of the smileys and featuring a kind of lorem ipsum devised from the letters *h* and *n*, the verso and recto pages mirroring each other nonsensically. A press release offered only basic information about the artist's general practice, inviting visitors to find their own entry point. Dean seems interested in how, when repeated enough, things—words, forms, or gestures—lose their meanings and acquire new ones. Hence the ubiquitous smiley, which is both language and its lack, a human representation and digital cypher, an encapsulation of emotional experience and its corporate stand-in: an avatar perhaps for what late theorist Lauren Berlant called cruel optimism, in which an "object that you thought would bring happiness becomes an object that deteriorates the conditions for happiness." Poured by the artist himself, the concrete of Dean's structures—including a henge of craniopagus smileys, some upside down, that were installed in Kreps's downstairs space—indeed flirted with decay, their balletic, sometimes emaciated forms suggesting a fragile foil to the grim Brutalist architecture that litters the United Kingdom.

Or not. Dean's art feels designed to simultaneously rebuff and embrace all interpretation. "What is important to me is somehow not to present myself as a poet, but to produce a moment in which the viewer can be the poet," Dean has said. Like fiction written in the second person, this authorial deference, while seemingly generous, instead reveals a lack of confidence in one's audience, as though they cannot be trusted to imaginatively engage with a work of art fully on its own terms. Despite the ensuing air of incompleteness, Dean's delicate attention to shape and his empathetic use of materials is a boost to morale. At their best, his new sculptures fuse the artificiality of our emoji era to what Flaubert called "the melancholy of the antique world." It is a realm, the author wrote, that "seems to me more profound than that of the moderns, all of whom more or less imply that beyond the dark void lies immortality. But for the ancients that 'black hole' is infinity itself; their dreams loom and vanish against a background of immutable ebony. No crying out, no convulsions—nothing but the fixity of the pensive gaze."

—*Zack Hatfield*

Brea Souders

BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY

It is not easy to make an imaginative photograph, because the document tends to solidify whatever it re-presents: The camera's eye is not unlike Medusa's, turning everything it sees into stone—petrifying it so that it loses subjective import, becomes hard matter of fact however much it is felt (or romanticized) by the person taking the picture. The camera's ruthless gaze traps consciousness in reification, as Theodor Adorno surmised. According to the German philosopher, under the "total spell" of the camera's view, "the subject is lifeless," despite the artist's attempt to infuse the photograph with feeling. The camera regards everything with a peculiar indifference, even while it seems to emphasize difference: This result is the implicit paradox of every photographic document.

The "disembodied shadows of human beings," as the press release refers to them, that haunted the great outdoors in Brea Souders's "Vistas," the photographer's solo exhibition here, epitomized the self-alienation of capitalist technological society. The figures were anonymous, but their darkness suggested a melancholic—or even apocalyptic—sort of import, for they evoked a canceled reality, a denaturalized nature. "While researching Google Photo Sphere images of [national] parks," the press release continues, Souders "observed that the algorithm removed people from its shared photos, seemingly for privacy reasons, but left behind their distorted and artifacted shadows," i.e., traces of their appearance, which is one way of understanding what a photograph *is*. Souders appropriated these phantoms, along with the rugged settings in which they

Brea Souders, *Untitled #26 (from Vistas)*, 2019, watercolor on ink-jet print, 12½ × 10".