

October 17, 2013

Paola Pivi: ‘Ok, you are better than me, so what?’; ‘Audible Presence’

By ROBERTA SMITH

Galerie Perrotin

909 Madison Avenue, at 73rd Street

Through Oct. 26

Dominique Lévy

909 Madison Avenue Through Nov. 16

There are several ways to describe the frisson between the shows with which Galerie Perrotin, of Paris, and Dominique Lévy have inaugurated their galleries, in a former bank. Ms. Lévy’s show of works by Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein and Cy Twombly, plus Mr. Perrotin’s show of new work by the Italian Conceptual sculptor Paola Pivi, equals handmade versus factory-made, pre-Pop versus post-Pop, then versus now. Sharing market hotness, they form a useful core sample.

On Perrotin’s lower level, Ms. Pivi — for whom excess is a frequent theme — is showing “Money machine (true blue, baby I love you),” a big, grim blue metal cube that regularly disgorges a few coins or \$1 bills from one of three slots. This possible commentary on buying art as investment is undermined by Ms. Pivi’s ground-floor display. Here eight life-size stuffed polar bears cavort in hides of neon-colored parrot feathers. Conjuring two threatened species, the bears comment on — but also satisfy expensive tastes for — big art, exotic animals and pricey children’s toys à la F.A.O. Schwarz. That’s called having it both ways.

Upstairs Ms. Levy’s exhibition features often little-known works by the three revered artists (all dead) who exaggerated or abused painting to good effect. Twombly often treated stretched canvas as a writing surface. Excellent examples of Mr. Fontana’s punctured or slashed canvases are here, but the main attraction is the biomorphic plaster ceiling decoration he designed for a home in 1949 in Milan. Klein is best represented by a rare white sponge painting and an installation involving quantities of his signature eye-searing blue, on the ground and on six hanging dowels of wood. You may want to compare the time spent with both shows.