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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Art in review, from Times critics. MARCH 10, 2016

Shara Hughes, 'Trips I've Never Been On'

By ROBERTA SMITH

Shara Hughes's nervy new paintings are a bit like puppies: noisy, incautious and frequently irresistible. The first sight of "Trips I've Never Been On," her show at Marlborough Chelsea, is exhilarating. Ms. Hughes's big-voiced visionary landscapes jump — and sometimes galumph — with clashing colors; spatial conundrums; an obstreperous scale; and smart, heartfelt historical citations, especially to early modernism.

Most vistas are seen through broad frame-like borders, natural or not. The azure sea and pink beach of "Mushroom Hunt" appear in an oval formed by the brown walls of a fungus-rich cave. In "Eye of the Swell," three connected orbs — a hallucinated stoplight? — hover before mountainous terrain worthy of the outsider artist Joseph Yoakum; all is bordered by a narrow band of ultramarine waves and a wider one that loosely approximates birch bark.



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In "I Spy," an undulant deep-yellow border daubed with red and green encroaches on a moonlit view like a painter's palette, or another frame, run wild. "We Windy" has tricolor tree trunks, a pointillist poplar and layered hills reminiscent of David Hockney. Fauvism receives an exuberant salute in "Twisted," but with an exaggerated, comical effect suggesting a sunlit swamp. The most restrained, and best, paintings here are "Split Ends," a stereopticon view of an Edvard Munch-like path in tomato-red, green and white, and "Something Special." Here Munch is hinted at in the other poplar trees and its sparsely dabbed pastel ground, and where the border turns Cubist.

In these two memorable canvases, Ms. Hughes combines abandon with a greater sense of subtlety, reaping the advantage of toning things down ever so slightly.

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