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WHAT TO SEE IN N.Y.C. GALLERIES RIGHT NOW - MAJA RUZNIC

By John Vincler



Maja Ruznic's "Mother (Blue-Yellow Hand)," from 2021, in her new show, "Consulting With Shadows."Credit...Maja Ruznic and Karma

Figures with mask-like faces materialize as if from a mist in Maja Ruznic's latest paintings. Sometimes the figures do not appear at all, as in the all-over abstraction of "Mother (Green Purple)," which uncannily reads like a dreamy moonlit reimagining of Monet's water lilies. In the 33 paintings and works on paper on view, all from 2021, Ruznic conjures many other artists while remaining firmly her own. Her abstract paintings and backgrounds recall the saturated tones of Clyfford Still and, at their best, approach the reverential awe of Mark Rothko. The insectlike shape of "Mother & Child (Green)" suggests the spider-mother monsters of Louise Bourgeois. "Father (Consulting Shadows I)" evokes the geometries and theosophical symbolism of Hilma af Klint. "Mother (Blue-Yellow Hand)" seems to refer to Marlene Dumas's toddler daughter, depicted in "The Painter" with hands in contrasting red and blue. Here, in Ruznic's inversion, the titular mother's hands are covered in blue and yellow paint, as if reaffirming her role as artist after becoming a mother.

The works here were made after giving birth mid-pandemic and document the sleep-deprived night-space of early motherhood. Despite the many references, this isn't busy postmodernism nor academic pastiche. Ruznic's gathering of nocturnes are coherent and lyrical, often strongest when not trying to do too much. While fewer works would have made for a more refined exhibition, the small paintings and works on paper can make you wonder how they relate to the eight larger paintings, providing an opportunity to speculate over how the artist works.