

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Alex Greenberger, “Then is Now: In ‘The History Show,’ Artists Become Collage-Making Magicians ” *ARTnews*. February 24, 2017.

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### Then Is Now: In ‘The History Show,’ Artists Become Collage-Making Magicians

BY ALEX GREENBERGER

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“The History Show,” 2017, installation view.

COURTESY **FOXY PRODUCTION**, NEW YORK/MARK WOODS

Where did the sudden craze for figurative painting come from? It didn't just materialize, and “The History Show,” an exhibition at Foxy Production, is proof. This tightly curated show draws a line between 1950s photo-collages, '80s allegories, and new work by emerging artists, offering one motive that underlies almost every work: the drive to cut up ready-made images, rearrange them, and put them back together in bizarre, subversive ways.

Collages by **Jess** (a.k.a. Jess Collins) provide the historical perspective. Drawing on the Dada tradition of photo-collage, his 1954 work *Der Alte Geiger*, in which a dog-headed violinist barely notices a woman dropping a chair over a balcony, is made of mass-market prints and illustrations. Assembled with wit and child-like glee, it shows that, in a world filled with pictures, it's an artist's job to appropriate, remix, and recycle.

Juan Davila makes that impulse contemporary with his paintings on posters ordered online. In one work, Davila transforms an image of a tuxedoed man into a Picabiaesque portrait. Two little devils, one on each shoulder, tease him; the image is mysteriously captioned with the word “CHILE.”

Picabia’s influence hangs over most young artists’ work here, in particular **Christine Wang**’s delightful paintings, in which Thomas Kinkade–like pictures of sun-soaked cottages and rosebuds are painted on cardboard. With Wang’s work, the chintzy pictures that would likely hang in Grandma’s house have so little value that they don’t even merit a canvas. Other artists here draw on Picabia’s subversive allegories. E’Wao Kagoshima’s *Positive on the Q.T.* (1982) turns the three muses into a hypnotic tableau where one woman’s breast leaks milk, another’s spills blood, and a third catches the blood in a jar.

That strange eroticism is also found in **Vanessa Gully Santiago**’s *Video Sex* (2015), a clever, though slightly out-of-place, painting in which a couple film themselves making love, their bodies moving from real life to camera, from camera to Macbook. Even more impressive are **David Rappeneau**’s drawings, which feature big-breasted millennials dropping cigarette ashes and popping open beer bottles. Warped as though captured via a fish-eye lens, they suggest Wolfgang Tillmans’s party photography for the Facebook era.

Rappeneau’s work isn’t ironic—there’s something very endearing about his androgynous characters. And overall, there’s something genuine about this show, too. It smartly ends with a Jess work, *Zap* (1993), in which a man’s fingers give off electricity, causing a mirror to explode into fireworks. Nevermind the fact that, in the original image, the man was probably doing something less exciting. Here, thanks to Jess’s mash-up of ready-made pictures, this total nobody becomes a magician.