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By ROBERTA SMITH, JASON FARAGO, MARTHA SCHWENDENER and WILL HEINRICH JAN. 17, 2018



Raphaela Simon

Through Feb. 11. Tramps and Michael Werner Gallery, 75 East Broadway, second floor, Manhattan; michaelwerner.com.



Raphaela Simon's striped abstractions, with "The Kiss" (2017) framed in the doorway.
Mark Woods/TRAMPS and Michael Werner Gallery

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“Karo,” the New York solo debut of the talented young German painter Raphaela Simon, is an energizing twofold of art and setting. It proves that the old — in this case striped abstraction — can be made new again and that necessity remains the mother of invention for young art dealers.

The Tramps gallery is a shoestring operation run by Parinaz Mogadassi (who founded the first Tramps in London) in collaboration with the Michael Werner Gallery (her day job). It occupies a series of about 10 tiny glass-walled shops on the second floor of a mall in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Their slat-wall paneling and often strong colors (purple, green and pink) are usually unchanged, and they work well with Ms. Simon’s midsize squarish paintings. On this occasion, she explores the territory between representation and pure abstraction with compositions that mostly center on blue and white vertical stripes with bits of black. She cherry-picks ideas about simple geometries (and stripes) from Peter Halley, Frank Stella and Agnes Martin, but filters them through her own notions of wit, scale, materials and abbreviation. It is of utmost importance that her oil surfaces are layered, which gives them solidity, and that the edges of her many stripes rarely seem ruled, which gives them life.

The multispace installation is marvelous. Each little shop isolates one or two paintings, as if in their own pavilion or vitrine, with others always visible through the glass walls. Especially emblematic of Ms. Simon’s sensibility is a work installed on a purple wall (the other yellow vinyl floor is one of Ms. Mogadassi’s few additions). The painting’s vertical blue-and-white stripes are interrupted midway by a wider horizontal band above which the verticals resume, bend toward one another and meet. This is “The Kiss,” a kind of corporate-seeming homage to [Brancusi’s famous sculpture](#), but a sweet one, with matching pajamas. Ms. Simon’s other compositions justify, without being too reliant on, titles like “Elephant,” “Pharaoh,” “Mole” and “Carpet,” which features a morphing blue-and-white checkerboard. The paintings’ airy serenity seems unfazed by their setting. Does this mean they might never look so good again, or that they’re now seasoned, ready for any environment fate throws at them? Either way, Ms. Simon’s paintings, in Ms. Mogadassi’s variation on the white cube, are something to see.

ROBERTA SMITH