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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in January



By Will Heinrich

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This week, Will Heinrich visits Brian Buczak's double exhibition in TriBeCa and Union Square, sees Joyce Kozloff's square paintings of conflict zones and takes a close look at a group show about books in Chelsea.



Ed Atkins's "Pianowork 2," 2023; a 16-minute video projection with sound, loop. Ed Atkins, via dépendance, Brussels; Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; Cabinet, London; and Gladstone Gallery

CHELSEA

Ed Atkins

Through Jan. 6. Gladstone Gallery, 530 West 21st Street, Manhattan; 212-206-7606, gladstonegallery.com.

The British artist Ed Atkins is screening a double feature of recent video projections in Gladstone's Chelsea space.

Atkins's 16-minute "Pianowork 2" plunges deep inside the so-called uncanny valley, where digital simulations come close to perfect realism and seem the weirder for it. Using motion-capture technology, Atkins recorded himself playing a modernist piece for piano; the collected data was then turned into a nearly perfect digital animation of the same scene — "nearly" being the operative word. Atkins's avatar emotes at the keyboard, just as any human pianist might — as we assume Atkins did, playing — but tiny glitches tell us that we are watching a digital creature that could never feel real emotions.

With traditional animation, we'd know that everything onscreen came from someone's imagination; with a traditional video recording, we'd assume the scene had some real-world analogue. But "Pianowork 2" suggests the real, while making sure we don't trust it.

Its companion at Gladstone, an 80-minute projection called "Sorcerer," is a collaboration with the writer Steven Zultanski. It seems like the straightforward record of a theatrical piece: Two women and a man recite lines on a set that more or less recreates someone's living room; their dialogue sounds like the almost-random chatter of friends, transcribed direct from life. Without going digital, this results in some of the same tensions as "Pianowork 2": The transcribed chatter evokes the real, but putting it onstage is all about artifice.

Maybe the uncanny valley has always been a place where human culture likes to hang out. **BLAKE GOPNIK**