

GLADSTONE

Holland Cotter, Blake Gopnik, Will Heinrich, Walker Mimms, Travis Diehl and Max Lakin,
“What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in December,” *The New York Times*, December 31, 2023

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

By Holland Cotter, Blake Gopnik, Will Heinrich, Walker Mimms, Travis Diehl and Max Lakin

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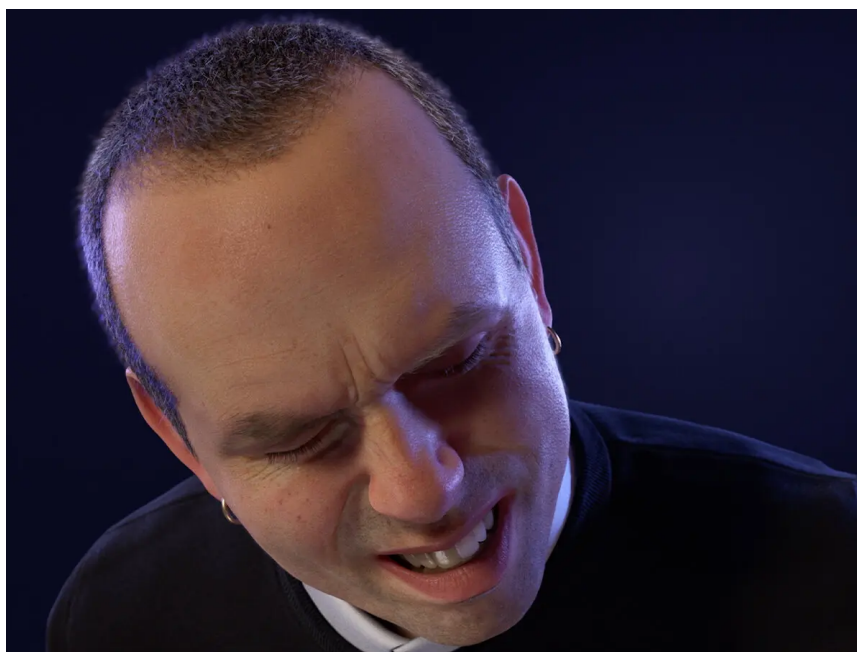
Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Check out a trove of South African art on the Upper East Side and Ed Atkins’s avatars in Chelsea. And don’t miss Kayode Ojo’s sleek sculptures in TriBeCa.

Newly Reviewed

CHELSEA

Ed Atkins

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



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

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*