

ARTFORUM

“As We Were Saying: Art and Identity in the Age of ‘Post’”

EFA PROJECT SPACE

323 West 39th Street, 2nd Floor

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“As We Were Saying: Art and Identity in the Age of ‘Post,’” a sprawling group exhibition curated by Claire Barliant, makes a necessary case for the continued relevance of identity politics by presenting various aesthetic strategies tackling race, sex, and class in a dizzying variety of media—activist posters from the second-wave feminist era, assemblage, sculpture, video, and writing. A central aim runs throughout the exhibition—a tentative revising of postmodern politics and dispersed, network-based views of sexuality and gender in the arts.



Simone Leigh’s *Blue Black*, 2014, distills these complexities into an unapologetically beautiful and conceptually replete bust. Approximating a historically evocative oval shape, the work takes up a tradition—as exemplified by Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun—of portraiture as a means of proclaiming feminine respectability, though this connection falls apart into the abyss of a hollowed-out head. Leigh’s figure, devoid of a face or a brain, appears to have had her (or his?) capacity for individuality and memory stolen. These centerpieces of human life have been ripped from this body and replaced with a crown of thorns (or roses), a lyrical illustration of the violent silencing faced by women, especially women of color, throughout history. Leigh’s sculpture, in tandem with more overtly political works such as A. K. Burns’s and Katherine Hubbard’s *In spirit of (a major in women’s studies)*, 2014—a meditation on the constructed nature of the body—necessitates a rejection of postidentity rhetoric in favor of a renewed commitment to the multiplicity of possible interventions that can be enacted by identity politics.

— William J. Simmons

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