

FORT GANSEVOORT

TORY DAILY

Art & Design Issue: To Do, Deborah Roberts at Fort Gansevoort
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Installation photograph courtesy of Deborah Roberts and Fort Gansevoort, New York

Despite the stereotype of an artist's career as a predominantly solitary one, alone in a studio with the only companions being paints and tools and your own thoughts, no artist exists in an ivory tower really. Each painting, each work is built upon and sandwiched in layers of cultural and visual strata. And when it's good, really, really good, the viewer disappears into a rabbit hole of connect-the-dots.

Which is what happens at *In-gé-nue*, Deborah Roberts' solo show at New York's Fort Gansevoort gallery; it is really good. In the exhibit, the Austin-based artist meditates on the ideal standards of beauty in a series of portraits of young African-American girls. Scratch that. She doesn't simply meditate on them, she confronts, challenges, subverts them — and she does so in the materials too. Her portraits are all collages, patchworked together from magazines or online sources, in an off-kilter Dadaist way. Some body parts are bigger than others, proportions are off, limbs are positioned in unnatural poses. Often the girls curl their hands into a fist, or wear an oversized boxing glove the size of their heads. Her child-like figures are fragmented — literally — but there's a strength here too.

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“Whether I was aware of it or not, otherness has been at the center of my consciousness since the beginning of my artistic career,” writes Roberts in her artist statement . “I’m interested in the way young girls symbolize vulnerability but also a naïve strength. The girls who populate my work, while subject to societal pressures and projected images, are still unfixed in their identity. Each girl has character and agency to find their own way amidst the complicated narratives of American, African American and art history.” There’s a lot to unpack in *In-gé-nue* . The eye wanders and the mind wonders. And we can’t wait to see what Roberts — whose work is also on view in *Fictions* at The Studio Museum in Harlem — does next.

In-gé-nue runs until December 23rd and *Fictions* , until January 15th.



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Still We Rise, 2017, by Deborah Roberts,
Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort,
New York

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