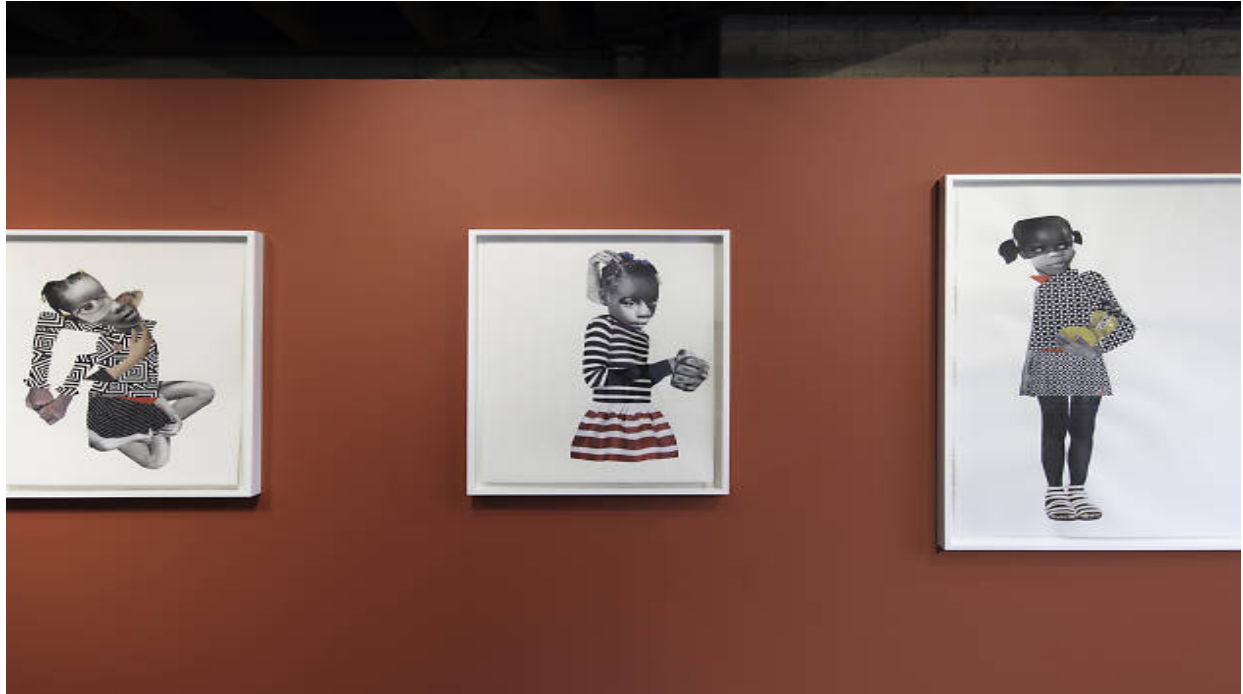


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TIMEOUT NEW YORK

Deborah Roberts, “in-gé-nue”

December 4, 2017



Photograph: Courtesy Fort Gansevoort

Time Out says

4 out of 5 stars

Part Frankenstein’s monster, part golem of self-empowerment, each of the subjects in Deborah Roberts’s collages is depicted as a cubistic melange of mismatched features gleaned from cut-up magazine images. They are young African-American girls, ages somewhere between 8 and 11, and while their treatment in the work seems harshly discordant, it is consistent with Roberts’s point: That childhood for black women is especially contested, given the racism and sexism they confront. But these “ingenues,” as the Austin artist describes them, seem more than ready to push back.

While their faces and limbs are mostly rendered in black-and-white, their clothing and other accoutrements shine with bold patterns and bright colors, a graphic combination that lands like a punch. Tonally, the works are just as aggressive, conveying in-your-face attitude with expressionistic distortions: One girl, all gangly arms and elbows, brandishes a man-size paw; another has raised fists sprouting from her head like so many angry cornrows. Nearby, lists of typical African-American female names

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(Shaniqua, etc.) overwritten with disparaging comments seem to provide a stinging subtext to the imagery.

Roberts's ingenues owe a considerable debt to Romare Bearden's collages from the mid-'60s; you might even call them homages. But whereas Bearden portrayed the frenetic street life of his present, Roberts shows us children armoring themselves against a future that refuses to understand them.

By: Howard Halle

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