

Frieze

Reviews /

More than Words: Carnegie Prize Winner Lynette Yiadom-Boakye Explores Fiction in Painting

BY THORA SIEMSEN

For her fourth exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, the artist paints portraits from her imagination



On the heels of her Carnegie Prize win last year comes Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's fourth show at Jack Shainman. 'In Lieu Of A Louder Love' presents 26 new oil paintings from 2018; a stunning annual output for any artist, but Yiadom-Boakye typically finishes each painting in the span of one day, as Zadie Smith reported in a profile of the artist in *The New Yorker* in 2017. More of Yiadom-Boakye's myth: she paints fictional figures from her imagination and not portraits, writes in fiction that which she feels she cannot paint. An unpublished short story of hers from several years ago features a

family killed off by a **'depressed squirrel and a wise crab'**, in the words of *frieze* editorial director **Jennifer Higgle**, who wrote about the artist for this magazine in 2012. Some of the paintings in 'In Lieu' subdue the dreamier elements involved with Yiadom-Boakye's imaginary animals: placing a falconry glove on an arm for a white owl to perch on in a painting called *The Ever Exacting*. Nearby, the work *Black Allegiance to the Cunning* unleashes the dreamlike, showing a fox underfoot lounging on the black and white checkered floor of a handsome interior.



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, 'In Lieu of a Louder Love', 2019, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

There's the shock of a pink pillow on a red couch in *The Ventricular*. This particular work recalls Yiadom-Boakye's study of Degas's 1896 painting *La Coiffure* (Combing the Hair), which Yiadom-Boakye wrote <https://frieze.com/article/artists-artists-1> about for this magazine: '*La Coiffure* teaches an important lesson about economy: don't use ten marks where three will do. I've also learnt about red from this painting: how to make it work. And that it is possible to lay scarlet next to orange, next to deep cadmium red, next to pink, next to black and bring the whole thing to life with a few patches of bare canvas and white.'

Yiadom-Boakye has also been highlighted for her evocation of Degas as a balletomane. Whereas Degas shadowed dancers at the Palais Garnier, requiring long-held poses to make his portraits, Yiadom-Boakye's dancers at the barre are fictive. Her painting *A Concentration* focuses on four ballerinos, three at a respite, one in a stretch. Painting a fair number of men and women dancers in

her work, Yiadom-Boakye transcends Degas's **woman problem**, summed up in his own confession to painter Georges Jeanniot: 'I have perhaps too often considered woman as an animal.' No body looks like a curio in 'In Lieu'.



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, *Black Allegiance to the Cunning*, 2018, oil on linen, 200 × 150 × 4 cm.
Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

'In Lieu' arranges dancers mid-arabesque; athletes in repose, their feet arched or their core engaged; uniforms throughout (one dancer wears plumage in a painting called *Les Corbeaux*). Horizontal bodies with downcast eyes seem to keep private the heat between them. Solitary figures break away from their book to look back at the viewer. There are those, too, who keep reading. Two men share an armrest while they people-watch, the blur of colours behind them the verdure of London's Blackheath. In another painting of another posh park, *4PM Hampstead*, nature makes strangers of a man and woman using the same tree to support their stares in different directions. Elsewhere, there's a sense of celebration, cigarettes being lit, smoked, glasses raised in toast. And perhaps the strangest innovation of the paintings: nobody seems lonely here.

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, 'In Lieu of a Louder Love' was on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, from 10 January until 16 February 2019.

Main image: Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Les Corbeaux (detail), 2018, oil on linen, 200 x 179 x 4 cm (each). Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
