

REGEN PROJECTS

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The New York Times

Sue Williams: 'Al-Qaeda Is the CIA'

By ROBERTA SMITH OCT. 22, 2010

303 Gallery

547 West 21st Street

Chelsea

Through Saturday

Since no museum has given Sue Williams the survey she deserves, [303](#), to which she has returned after a five-year hiatus at the David Zwirner Gallery, has done the deed. Or at least it has allowed the artist Nate Lowman, working with Ms. Williams, to do it.

Together they have covered a lot of ground in a then-and-now weaving together of work that emphasizes Ms. Williams's skills as a satirist, and her innate and continuing predilection for political incorrectness — from her early take-no-prisoners dissection of misogyny, which was almost as hard on women as it was on men, to her more subjective conviction that, as the show's title puts it, "Al-Qaeda Is the CIA." In the middle of it is a refusal to make nice with the tradition of all-over abstraction, one of the cardinal principles of the Abstract Expressionist.

The installation alternates between Ms. Williams's rough-surfaced black-and-white paintings from the early 1990s, with their often hilarious excoriations of men's inhumanity to women, and her more recent luridly colored, sleek-surfaced semi-abstractions, which are composed mostly of thinly disguised bodies, body parts, internal organs or bodily fluids and substances.

There are large paintings, like the "Two Greens With Sable" from 2002, which is as close as she comes to pure abstraction, and a cluster of small oil studies that showcase her skill at riffing on the body and the comedy of anguish it can inspire.

The effect is exhilarating, and the jarring juxtapositions of earlier and later works make a larger statement about the challenge Ms. Williams faces: to find some further middle ground between the rough and the sleek, and the excoriating and the all-over, by becoming less of a satirist and more of a painter. Judging by the bracing show that she and Mr. Lowman have arranged, she may already know this. **ROBERTA SMITH**