

# LAUREL GITLEN

122 NORFOLK ST.  
NEW YORK, NY 10002

T 212 274 0761  
F 212 590 6191  
LAURELGITLEN.COM

## ARTFORUM

### CRITICS' PICKS

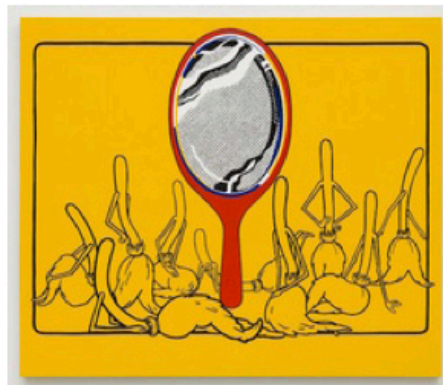
### Emily Mae Smith

LAUREL GITLEN  
122 Norfolk Street  
September 9–October 25

The star of Emily Mae Smith's imaginative exhibition of hyperstylized paintings is the broom from Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). At once an instrument of domestic labor and a tool of sorcery, the broom is a thinly disguised symbol that Smith calls upon to address sexual politics. In *The Mirror*, 2015, an oversize Lichtensteinesque hand mirror is surrounded by nine brooms. Each is posed seductively, parodying the clichéd and all too familiar representation of the female nude in western art (think of Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*, 1814).

Central to Smith's thinking is scopophilia, and it is no coincidence that nearly all of her paintings play with but ultimately deny the gaze. Vaguely reminiscent of an Absolut Vodka advertisement, *Still Life*, 2015, for instance, depicts a sunglasses-wearing, full-lipped babe. Where her eye should be—that is, inside the contours of her lens—we find instead suggestive imagery, a melting ice cube and a ruby-red cherry, rendered in a photorealist style.

The most striking work in the exhibition takes as its subject the mythological figure of Medusa. Set against a brilliant red background that gradates to fuchsia, Medusa's mane of serpents emerges from the phallic, open-mouthed head of Smith's broom. Historically a symbol of the dark power of female beauty and sensuality, Medusa was appropriated and rebranded by second-wave feminists (such as French literary critic Hélène Cixous and British film theorist Laura Mulvey) as an icon of the female gaze, making her a perfect heroine for Smith's comically disruptive critique of patriarchy.



Emily Mae Smith, *The Mirror*, 2015, oil on linen, 46 x 54".

— *Natalie Musteata*