

# The New York Times

## What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in December

LOWER EAST SIDE

### Cynthia Lahti

Through Jan. 13. James Fuentes, 55 Delancey Street, Manhattan; 212-577-1201, [jamesfuentes.com](http://jamesfuentes.com).



Installation view of Cynthia Lahti's "Little Storms" at James Fuentes. At the center is "Green Lady," from 2011. via Cynthia Lahti and James Fuentes; Photo by Jason Mandella

There's a contrary beauty to Cynthia Lahti's gloopy ceramic figures, like some romantic ideal chewed on and emerging gnarled, but more emotionally recognizable for it. Her figures appear like dazed Meissen porcelains, jolted from their lives of leisure into

messier, more honest ones. Their poses are a taxonomy of anxiety — hunched, slumped, sheltering a cigarette against a nonexistent gust — with expressions that strain legibility, though whether a face is pinched in pain or perturbation is mostly a matter of degrees. “Green Lady” (2011), its mottled coloring closer to oxidized metal, is either overcome by anguish or shielding her eyes from the sun. Either way, she’s not having a nice time.

The anatomical deformities of several of the figures speak to an awareness of the body’s fragility and all that can go wrong with it. “Sock” (2009) depicts a body from the waist down in a kind of reverse bust: exaggerated, uneven limbs and detached appendages floating helplessly alongside, an effect that’s both comic and grisly.

As with Manet’s visible brushstrokes, Lahti’s thumbbed-clay forms aren’t ashamed to display the marks of their making. And yet, with their craggy surfaces, inexact glazes and abstracted, barely-there forms, they can look more like accidents of nature, and looking at them can feel like finding the rough contours of a face in a slab of rock. Akin to the pitted wabi-sabi of Japanese Mino ware, Lahti’s figures suggest an acceptance of imperfection and a contentment with the unfinished — a freedom in their flaws. *MAX LAKIN*