

Tanya Leighton

The New York Times

Art Gallery Shows to See in February

CHELSEA

Esteban Jefferson

Through Feb. 25. 303 Gallery, 555 West 21st Street, Manhattan; 212-255-1121, 303gallery.com.



Esteban Jefferson's "November 11, 2020," from 2022, oil and graphite on linen. via Esteban Jefferson and 303 Gallery, New York; Photo by Dario Lasagni



Esteban Jefferson's "September 17, 2021," from 2022. via Esteban Jefferson and 303 Gallery, New York; Photo by Dario Lasagni

The title of Esteban Jefferson's exhibition at 303 Gallery, "May 25, 2020," marks the murder of George Floyd. Rather than the hot rage of the protests that followed, Jefferson's six oil and pencil works here cast a cool, almost academic gaze on some of the movement's touchstones. A pair of canvases fix Brooklyn's Continental Army Plaza equestrian bronze of George Washington from the same

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angle on two different days. “November 11, 2020” shows the statue in an aftermath, its pedestal crowded with traffic cones and graffiti. Sketches of police barricades hem in the base — as is Jefferson’s style, the canvas roils but only the statue is fully rendered, a heavy weight. The other painting revisits the scene roughly a year later: A pair of shoes garlands the horse’s bridle and an expressionistic beige patchwork of anti-graffiti paint covers the plinth. In the foreground, the ghost of a raised fist.

In the Washington paintings, as well as in two canvases featuring the African American, Puerto Rican, and Pan-African flags, a pastel mistiness buffers the intensity at the pictures’ center. This is probably less to emphasize overburdened symbols than to dramatize the way such burdens suck the color from the surrounding world. A last, looser pair of paintings captures the contested equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt, attended by Black and Indigenous stereotypes, that once introduced the American Museum of Natural History. The solidity of the bronze figures, even in disgrace, contrasts with the hollowness of the burly workers laboring to hoist them away. *TRAVIS DIEHL*