

CHURNER *and* CHURNER

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Karen Heagle: 'Let Nature Take Its Course and Hope It Passes'

By ROBERTA SMITH

I-20 Gallery

557 West 23rd Street, Chelsea

Through Nov. 12

Karen Heagle is taking her time when it comes to artistic development, negotiating her own particular fusion of personal Symbolism, latently academic naturalism and pre-Pop illustration with equal emphasis on wholesome sincerity and a deeply buried sense of irony. (One imagines the paintings of Gustave Courbet and various issues of *Field & Stream* magazine among her inspirations.) Her third solo [show](#) in New York evinces a somewhat sullen, don't-rush-me determination and enough growth to indicate that she will get there sooner or later.

Her latest works are often large paintings on paper that depict animals in the wild, as freshly killed game or as taxidermied trophies sharing walls with various artworks. Throughout, the addition of copper leaf has brightened the darkish palette and raised the visual ante, but still, the paintings' parts tend to be more interesting than their wholes.

In "Let Nature Takes Its Course (and Hope It Passes)," which features a deer's head on a copper-leafed brick wall flanked by earlier Heagle paintings, the eye moves from the wall to a gaily painted goblet, to a similarly bright candelabra. The bluntly handled colors evoke Marsden Hartley's 1916 painting "Handsome Drinks," a bright little homage to the cocktail hour, in the Brooklyn Museum. In "Studio Still Life With Partially Disemboweled Deer" one is struck primarily by the abstract shapes, in metallic reds, of a broken window and a coffee can full of paintbrushes that is an almost direct quote of Jasper Johns's 1960 painted bronze sculpture of a similarly employed Savarin coffee can. Ms. Heagle only achieves unity of the entire working surface in the relatively small, gleaming "Self-Portrait in Armor," an archaic symbol connoting courage and solitude that seems apt.