

ARTFORUM



Hannah van Bart, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on linen, 53 x 31 1/2".

HANNAH VAN BART

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At first glance, Hannah van Bart's current exhibition of paintings appears to be nearly all portraits of one woman. A figure with soft breasts, solid legs, and a face of fleshy innocence stares out from the middle of each canvas. Depending on her garb and demeanor, she's either louche or enticing, with clothes that cover or reveal a warm body ripe for bruising. The appearance of a lit cigarette held by an arm that's slowly vanishing into the pinky-brown miasma of *Untitled, 2016*, seems subtly violent. The artist plays with an abundance of patterns as well, such as stripes and lattices. In *Untitled, 2015*, van Bart has painted a brick wall that bleeds into her foregrounded figure. All of the picture's distinct features meld into one solid and strangely impenetrable image.

There's a painting of a forest: *Untitled, 2016*. On the canvas's left side, the quivering lines of branches and roots begin to appear anthropomorphic—are we looking at a face? This mysterious visage highlights the conceptual continuum in which the artist works, where designs melt into seemingly sentient bodily forms—the space between the two realms is purposefully murky. The exhibition's title, "The Smudge Waves Back," offers some insight. It is taken from David Mitchell's 2010 novel, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. In the book is a scene where a father waves to his son from a distance. The boy waves back, but the father can only see an indistinct, animated form—a meaningful smear, abundant with love.