

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Suellen Rocca

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 523 WEST 24TH STREET
523 West 24th Street
September 9–October 22

Paintings, drawings, purses—if one of these things does not belong, then who really wants to be in that club? Suellen Rocca's show of twenty-five works from 1965 to 1969, featuring that happy trio, blithely goes its own way, giving pointers to younger artists who incorporate the bold outlines and bright colors of comics, animation, and traditional illustration in their paintings. Mind you, this isn't some wiseass appropriationist's high/low move—Rocca's pictures are resolutely hieroglyphic, and what they take from the ancients gets made up into wiggly modern forms with funky, plastic colors. A pinup-posed figure shrinks away in *Bare Shouldered Beauty*, 1965, while stuttering scenarios wallpaper the background. Its language is a cipher, but this doesn't date it, as the scattered focus has the frequency of now.

The title for the drawing *Easy to Handle*, 1968, announces itself in the picture with cursive relish. In it, a faceless figure gingerly holds up a bag that promises her ease and deference. Her loins sport lovers doing a bland smooch surrounded by an aura of "ahs" and a "kiss me." Beneath the scene the artist pays herself a compliment: "This is a lovely picture." Against a black ground, drooping fingers, or dicks, point to hovering flicks of cotton fuzz, which set Our Lady of the Lovely Picture in bright relief. *Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature*, 1965, seems to be the anchor of the show. The oil-on-canvas diptych is predominately pink, with accents of lime green and chocolate brown. Organized with a rough symmetry, it sends the eye bopping around like a pinball. You can try counting the bottles, sofas, and ice-cream cones for clues, but in the end, Rocca's world might just be out of your league.



Suellen Rocca, *Easy to Handle*, 1968, colored pencil, ink, and cotton on paper, 29 x 23".

— Paige K. Bradley