

ZIEHERSMITH

# The New York Times

## What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By **ROBERTA SMITH**



“Netsuke 47” (2016) by Christoph Ruckhäberle.

### **CHRISTOPH RUCKHÄBERLE**

Once again, Christoph Ruckhäberle has painting surrounded, approaching it as reusable history, wisecracking craft, visual delight and abstract form, as ever beneath the guise of a slightly retro figurative style that he usually manages to make new. His latest efforts — in a show called “New Paintings” at ZieherSmith — are savvier and even more enticing. They revisit modernism with varied depictions of one of art’s oldest motifs: the reclining odalisque, sometimes nude, sometimes clothed. These works are small and portable, bright and taut, and use unmixed colors of high-gloss enamel in extraordinary combinations. Their hard, shiny surfaces are like shop signs: *Odalisques Painted Here*.

The women are uniformly wholesome and assume the same pose — one knee is bent and pointed, alertly, upward. But otherwise the works are highly diverse, with variations on Cubist and Surrealist distortion and segmentation as well as the classical representation of the early 1920s. Every occasion for geometry is exploited, be it a hairdo, a raised thigh or a garment. But most geometry is in the background, especially those tightly controlled with narrow parallel or gridded lines achieved by taping. Accidents are welcome, like the tendency of the colors to bleed from behind the tape in tiny fuzzy bursts.

Mr. Ruckhäberle has titled his series “Netsuke” — after the small sculptures invented in 17th-century Japan to fasten the cords on kimono sashes. Like Mr. Ruckhäberle’s paintings, netsuke are small, delightful, knowing objects that while highly aesthetic also fulfill a significant practical function. This may sound like a stretch, but spend a little time with these apparent sweet nothings as they reveal themselves and suggest that their deliberation and pleasure could make life better.