



## Art



## Ellen Berkenblit



**Anton Kern Gallery, through Mar 31**

A witchlike girl with a long, pointy nose and messy hair drools ribbons or laughs like a banshee. This fairy-tale avatar appears over and over in Ellen Berkenblit's latest paintings. She's seen mostly in profile, and seems to be happily unraveling in some state of frenzy. Berkenblit's slapdash paint handling only intensifies this effect, as dirty, acid-yellow strands of hair are depicted in swooping, uncontrollable arabesques, hot-pink ribbons erupt with urgent directness, and passages of brushy color surround the figure like scruffy auras.

Berkenblit has long married children's-book drawing to a deranged painting style that might be described as punk Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, the unabashed nostalgia of her current work could be cloying and obvious if not for the manner in which the forms are spewed out and continually disrupted.

These strange twists and turns offer unexpected visual rhymes, such as the one in *Striper*. Here, the pink in a sweater worn by a pigtailed subject is matched by a glyph-like trail of the same color, emanating from her eye.

In *Later That Night*, a one-toothed witch with thick black lashes turns her head impossibly backward to gaze down on her leg and high-heel shoe. The moon and stars are reflected in the rain-slicked street, while a jet of green arcs across the canvas. Amid the cartoon carnage, she turns inward, as ecstatic oblivion unfolds around her—an inkling, perhaps, of the artist's desires.