

THE NEW YORKER

“Samaritans”

Through March 3.
Presenhuber
39 Great Jones St.
Downtown



© Ellen Berkenblit; Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

The curator Dan Nadel, whose portal to art was underground comics, has a superbly weird eye and a mind that works like a Venn diagram. The sixteen artists in “**Samaritans**,” the split-level group show he organized at the Presenhuber gallery (on view through March 3), are united formally by their eccentricity and informally by their relationships. There are onetime high-school classmates (the painters Steve DiBenedetto and Ellen Berkenblit, whose “Captain of the Road” is pictured here), married couples (the sculptor Huma Bhabha and the painter Jason Fox, co-conspirators in gnarly aesthetics), and patron saints of the twisted (the polymathic cartoonist Gary Panter and the master of abjection Mike Kelley). Like any great curator, Nadel also makes soul mates of strangers, such as the underrated Bay Area painter Joan Brown, who died in 1990, and the young New York sculptor Sarah Peters, both in thrall to ancient modes of figuration. Especially once you descend into the basement, “Samaritans” has the appealing connect-the-dots vibe of a what-if conversation about, to list a few of the show’s subjects, past lives, extraterrestrials, and speaking in tongues.

— *Andrea K. Scott*