

ARTFORUM

Sascha Braunig

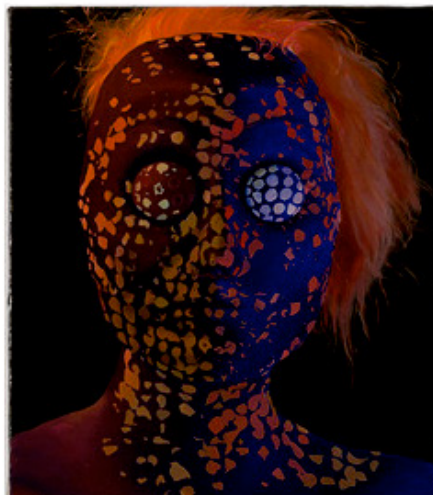
FOXY PRODUCTION

623 W 27 ST

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The nine portraits that make up Sascha Braunig's first solo exhibition are small but electric. Each painting holds its subject captive in unyielding patterns of intense colors, often with unsettling modifications of presumably human, and possibly female, faces. The generic features and bare shoulders suggest that these figures are merely masks, or grounds for scientific experiments: Eyes are more objects than organs, and mouths are shut tight, expressionless. This is most disturbing in *Eyes Peeled*, 2010, in which bulbous, exaggerated eyes stare straight out at the viewer. The figure's pink shock of hair is repeated in luminous flecks across her face as it pushes close to the surface, like a victim trying to escape a chemical attack.

The vacant backgrounds of these paintings prevent the viewer from inferring any specific context or place. However, each work evokes a futuristic impulse that recalls the Surrealists' desire to turn their women into uncanny automatons, as well as the luminous urban landscapes of science fiction films. This is particularly apparent in works that show glowing neon lights reflecting off their figures' faces (as in *Lashes*, 2011, where long metal strips are peeled away to reveal a burning red skin below). In other pieces, the "masks" immediately bring to mind the costumes of Leigh Bowery, but with a jarring stillness beneath the extravagant surface. Yet despite these associations, Braunig's paintings remain inventive, especially in the frequent moments when the saturated patterns give way to subtle details, such as the delicate strands of hair that are rendered within radiant orange and blue stripes in an untitled work. Such moments make the figures appear as more than just fantastic fabrications; each one has a unique sensitivity, and their utter strangeness is welcome rather than feared.



Sascha Braunig, *Eyes Peeled*, 2010, oil on linen, 16 x 14".

— Lumi Tan