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Art in Review

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER

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DELIA BROWN

Felicity and Caprice

D'Amelio Terras

525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea

Through May 4

A decade and a half into the figurative painting boom, artists are still raiding pockets of forgotten academic art and illustration and baiting viewers with their cringe-worthy finds. Delia Brown hasn't been particularly successful at this game. Her paintings often mirror their gilt and fashion-heavy sources a little too directly. She gains some ground here, though.

"Felicity and Caprice" is part of a continuing series of drawings based loosely on Claude Chabrol's 1968 film, "Les Biches." In Ms. Brown's hands, Mr. Chabrol's tale of a wealthy patron named Frédérique who picks up a street artist named Why is transformed into spare, disjointed storyboards starring Ms. Brown as a poodle-toting art collector. Ms. Brown's friend Hollis Witherspoon plays the young plein-air painter Felicity.

Drawn in graphite and white gouache on colored paper, the images recall academic drawing channeled through contemporary romantic fiction illustration. Mundane scenes like "Caprice Treats Felicity to a Hot Dog in Front of the Museum," "Caprice Admiring Felicity's Paintings" and "Felicity Handing the Coffee to Caprice" hang on a dark wall alongside sordid episodes like "Felicity Struggling With a Drugged Caprice" and the culminating "Caprice Drowned" in the bathtub.

In a gallery news release Ms. Brown says she is "stripping Allegory of its moral determinacy and therefore reducing it to a formal pastiche." Maybe. More interesting is how Ms. Brown has taken hold of a cache of references, from commercial illustration to French erotic cinema, and spun it into a deadpan, streamlined narrative about women, friendship and patronage. Given the vapid posing and high quotient of Champagne bottles in Ms. Brown's past work, this is a step forward.

-MARTHA SCHWENDENER