

BOMB

Looking Back on 2017: Art

Featuring selections by Corina Copp, Max Galyon, Patricia Spears Jones, S.D. Chrostowska, Karl Holmqvist, Phillip Lopate, Mary Simpson, and more.

Part of the [Looking Back](#) series.

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2017 saw a resurgence in grassroots political organization, starting with the J20 demonstrations. Yet shortly thereafter, protest subsided into ordinary workaday life. The sensation of festivity and the upsurge of community that flies in the face of any society conditioned by machine-like labor was quietly and easily diffused by the morality of “business as usual.” The proliferation of partisan Facebook statuses and the innumerable text messages sent to state representatives in the wake of Trump’s election only evidenced our loss. A better way to utilize one’s off hours can’t be imagined, which is precisely the problem.

Writing this on the 6th of December, I can almost accept the rather extravagant claim that art is dead. If to aestheticize means detaching artist and spectator both from any kind of moral responsibility for a work’s subject-

matter, then what can art really teach us? At the same time, I believe Alex Sewell's *Hookey*, which exhibited at [TOTAH](#) in the LES, beautifully captured art's dubious political value. The overt perfectionism of his photorealist skills felt deliberately staggered, belated. In a painting like *Arcade Slug*, for example, which depicts an enlarged quarter graffitied over with the words LET'S FUCK, he painstakingly destabilizes the grandiose importance normally attributed to "realistic" artworks. In these and other paintings, Sewell showed that there's a point where aesthetic detachment becomes mere vulgarity or cynicism. Art can never be a substitute for protest; and it's shameful to think that a painting can effectively contest an intolerable political situation.



Alex Sewell, *Arcade Slug*, 2016. Oil on shaped wood panel, 20 x 20 inches.