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**TWO COATS OF PAINT**  
March 3, 2014

*Speaking Deborah Brown's language*



Deborah Brown, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, 2014, oil on canvas, 70 x 80 inches

For several years, Deborah Brown translated the world around her Bushwick studio into paint. Celebrating the neighborhood's metal scaffolding, makeshift welded architecture, abandoned cars, fenced compounds, and ubiquitous graffiti, Brown's paintings, through her vivid use of color and loose paint handling, evoked French Romantics like [Eugene Delacroix](#) and Flemish masters such as [Peter Paul Rubens](#). In her new paintings, on view at Lesley Heller through March 9, Brown appears to have segued from Bushwick to art history, translating old master portraits and historical paintings, like Jacques-Louis David's [Napoleon](#)

[Crossing the Alps](#), into the robust language of tangled line and vivid color that she developed in the Bushwick paintings.

Most of the energetic paintings in her new series are based on details of well-known portraits, the sitter seemingly overwhelmed by some kind of crazy, top-heavy rollercoaster scaffolding or rings of barbed wire. According to the press release for the show, Brown is interested in the costumes, coiffures, and conventions of self-presentation inherent in portraiture and history painting. Fair enough. But I'm more engaged by the simpler, more abstract paintings that seem an apt metaphor for a busy artist with a long to-do list. On this score, Brown's magisterial iteration of Napoleon leading his army across the Alps into Italy to regain territory seized by the Austrians is challenging and thought-provoking, particularly in light of Brown's reputation as an important colonizer of the Bushwick arts community, albeit a benevolent one. Citing diverse influences such as Goya, Velazquez, George Condo, Cubism, and the tribal art of Africa and Oceania, Brown, who recently opened [Storefront Ten Eyck](#), is clearly intent on charging in a new direction. Her new work is as bold as it is generous, and I'm looking forward to seeing what happens next.



Deborah Brown, *Tête (Chignon)*, 2013, oil on masonite, 18 x 24 inches.



Deborah Brown, *Tête (Marie Antoinette)*, 2013, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches.

["Deborah Brown: Outer Limits."](#) Lesley Heller Workspace, LES, New York, NY. Through March 9, 2014.

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