subversive details, which become visible only when the viewer has recovered from the initial encounter with the artist's imagery. Organized by Kelly Shindler for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, (where this midcareer survey of Eisenman’s work originated), and by Kate Kraczon for the Institute of Contemporary Art, “Dear Nemesis” accomplished its goal of showing the breadth of the artist’s incisive investigations into art history and the changing view of the gendered body in the wake of postmodernism. Once Eisenman had brought us into her world—she accomplished this seduction with stunning speed—we saw her nuanced vision for a more equitable future, displayed not only in narrative or biography but also, intriguingly, in her handling of materials, and specifically of paint.

Sloppy Bar Room Kiss, 2011, for example, has often been viewed as a depiction of amorous, embracing androgynes, their bodies united by the boozy haze of love, and by Eisenman’s Jasper Johnsian cross-hatched brushstrokes, which fluidly weave between the figures. But equally “queer” is the artist’s treatment of seemingly mundane details outside the painting’s focal point. Seen from inside the establishment, the bar’s neon window sign, thickly materialized in paint, would of course appear in reverse; however, the paint’s application, raised above the rest of the background (which has been laid down so that it rests flat against the canvas and recedes in typically illusionistic fashion), is productively disorienting. Forcefully situated on top of the canvas, BAR is in the viewer’s world, even as it points to what is outside the bar patrons’ swirling, drunken refuge. Eisenman takes the viewer through

from the 1990s (which echo Lippard’s underacknowledged storefront-windows exhibition program that ran from 1979 to 1989) and, finally, architectural mock-ups for Printed Matter’s spacious new storefront and offices, which will open in Chelsea later this year. Providing a vast biographical arc and a vivid overview of the establishment’s internal mechanizations, the show presents a full and transparent picture of what sustainable cultural production and distribution actually looks like—broadcasting the highs (gaining nonprofit status, the popularity of the fairs) and lows (the 2008 economic downturn, the loss of more than nine thousand books during Hurricane Sandy).

To offset nostalgia, the show’s organizers—Printed Matter acting director Max Schumann and 80WSE gallery director Jonathan Berger—established a print shop in the final room, inviting six artists and collectives to undertake residencies. With a Risograph, a Xerox machine, a Vandercook letterpress proof press, and silk-screening and binding stations, this is a publishing paradise. Some of the resultant wares, such as stacks of silk-screened posters asserting RESISTANCE IS POSSIBLE (from the collective Red76) and DEEDS NOT WORDS (from Research and Destroy New York City), are being offered free near the entrance, where a pop-up Printed Matter storefront has also settled in. The posters came in handy on Saturday, December 13, when the boisterous Millions March protests against police brutality began gathering just outside the gallery in Washington Square Park. Before joining the demonstration, I perused the five-hundred-page Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report on the CIA’s interrogation-and-detention program, which Jesse Hlebo/Swill Children had speedily bolted together the day after it was publicly released.

This busy print shop—located just around the corner from the wall highlighting the NY and LA Art Book Fairs and a vitrine oddly memorializing related promotional items such as pencils, badges, and catalogues—produces an unusual friction, productively counterbalancing the show’s historical approach. Just as the fairs carry forward a flame for alternative publishing, so too does this forward-looking laboratory. In such a largely archival exhibition, that energy, impulse, and spontaneity are key. They’ve been part of Printed Matter all along.

—Lauren O’Neill-Butler

PHILADELPHIA

Nicole Eisenman
INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Despite frequent critical emphasis on their deliciously flamboyant narratives, Nicole Eisenman’s paintings derive their full impact from subtly and beyond the picture plane in a blurring of boundaries that recalls that of the ambiguously gendered pair she depicts. Under pressure from the canvas, the B in this sign breaks down like globs of cake batter—a tearful confection. Eisenman’s text vacillates between language, at once intelligible and nonsensical, and image, simultaneously abstract and imbued with meaning. Like Eisenman’s image field, her characters are caught between layers of representation in Sloppy Bar Room Kiss’s hall of bodies and mirrors. These bodies are more than androgynous; they are queer entities borne of and constituted by a precise and irreverent set of brushstrokes. In this way, Eisenman points to that which cannot be understood—a paradoxical spatial situation—while illustrating the beautiful inscrutability of sexuality and gender.

Eisenman is concerned with painting’s ability to convey such inscrutabilities. Her work reminds us of what has been excluded from cultural intelligibility—all that is outside Eisenman’s bar—whose exclusion is akin to the underrepresentation, erasure even, of minorities from within

Nicole Eisenman,
Sloppy Bar Room Kiss, 2011. Oil on canvas, 39 × 48".
the art world, exposed in “Readykeulous by Ridykeulous: This is What Liberation Feels Like™,” a group show co-organized by Eisenman and the artist A. L. Steiner that ran concurrently with the exhibition. Steiner and Eisenman filled the museum with statements of political revolution generated by a broad swath of participants, from Leidy Churchman to Eileen Myles to Kara Walker. Eisenman brings this queer history to her materials and does so with an earnest desire to share it with the public. In her work, she encourages her viewers to look to the margins, where we might find Death carousing with partygoers, or a mess of multicolored pigments stuck to the canvas’s edge like barnacles. In learning to look with an unbiased eye, we can approximate a new mode of vision that takes into account diverse lives, stories, genders, sexualities, and modes of embodiment.

—William J. Simmons