

Harren, Natilee, Erin M. Riley, *Artforum Critics' Pick*, 13 November 2020

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS HOUSTON

Erin M. Riley

Jonathan Hopson | 904 Marshall Street
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By Natilee Harren



Erin M. Riley, *Those Girls*, 2018, wool and cotton tapestry, 38 x 48".

While the Brooklyn-based artist Erin M. Riley is best known for hand-woven tapestries that depict sexy selfies of her own tatted-up body, her solo exhibition here offers a condensed meditation on more delicate and melancholic dimensions of her oeuvre. Seven works handloomed by the artist, often utilizing salvaged and hand-dyed yarn, are hung across two intimate spaces. The first presents forensic still lifes that suggest an ambivalent nostalgia for girlhood and the rites of adolescence. In *Those Girls and Them*, both 2018, the attributes of a sex-positive feminist—a totemic-looking dildo, baby-pink flowers, a beautifying charcoal mask, a vape pen, and a “Scorpio” signature necklace—are arranged for inspection and/or commemoration. In *Lady Slippers*, 2019, the titular plant sprouts jubilantly from a rocky forest floor, its testicular blossoms dangling over an array of sordid debris, including drug packets, syringes, and a cast-off condom. The most recent work, *11 Stitches Standing Up*, 2020, seems to detail a period of childhood convalescence narrated through an assortment of props such as lip balm, a Lisa Frank-style notebook, a copy of the 1985 YA novel *Six Months to Live* by Lurlene McDaniel, and a creepy, patchworked lovey.

In the second room, things get even darker. We find *Scared*, 2019, a roughly eight-foot-long and five-foot-high tapestry that presents a still from the drug-addiction reality show *Intervention* at monumental scale. The work depicts two padlocks hanging behind the grid of a chain-link fence. Below this scene, a closed-caption text reads, “I am scared to death.” Nearby is *The End*, 2018, a car-crash image translated into the horizontally striated texture characteristic of Riley’s woolen medium, thereby achieving a grotesque yet fascinating Warholian uncanniness. In these pieces, weave patterns evoke the fractured and fucked-up aesthetic of televisual white noise, or a distressed laser-printed image. The thematics of both rooms chillingly converge in the frisson of misapprehended textures and functions. Riley’s works—part comfort blanket, part burial shroud—combine craft materials and techniques with the horrors and vicissitudes of real life to marvelous (and marvelously macabre) effect.