The War at Home

On shows in New York: Jeffrey Joyal at David Lewis, Marianne Vitale at Invisible-Exports, Calvin Marcus at Clearing, and Watteau at the Frick

by Andrew Russeth
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Last Friday marked the 15-year anniversary of the start of the United States–led invasion of Afghanistan, the beginning of the seemingly perpetual War on Terror, which has laid waste to blood and treasure. During this period, contemporary art has been an inconsistent witness. Important works have engaged the conflict, but they have been few and far between. The war has ground on, and art has enjoyed a commercial boom work, with cash and attention flowing predominantly to apolitical work. And so it has been both heartening and intriguing to notice, at the start of this new season in New York, that a handful of shows are looking, directly and unflinchingly, at war—its weaponry, its people, its morality.

At David Lewis, the young New Yorker Jeffrey Joyal is making an auspicious solo debut with a show called “Raze the Little Feelers,” showing World War II–era cots in a cluster at the center of the gallery. Each has a latex cover, imprinted against a tile floor, a tin ceiling, or a peculiar old coin. Some have holes and various amounts of decorative fringe. Three large light bulbs with silver tops, each adorned with a taxidermy turkey head, hang from the ceiling to the floor. The mood is eerily quiet and spectral, the scene evoking a remote and sacred campsite haunted by many generations of American mourning. The cots are waiting. The bodies, you sense, are just going to keep coming.

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