

# The New York Times

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## Renée Cox

*Cristinerose Gallery  
529 West 20th Street  
Chelsea  
Through March 28*

Renée Cox emerged several years ago with a black-and-white self-portrait that showed her nude, larger than life and holding a robust baby boy, also naked. It asserted the power of black women in ways at once dignified and startling, honoring while bluntly revising art's mother-child theme. In her first solo show in New York, Ms. Cox continues to use her own physical presence to great effect, but her new direction, into bright color and camp, is not altogether positive.

Looking beautifully pumped and buffed, and wearing a handsome, if brief, costume in the colors of the Rastafarian flag, Ms. Cox plays the hero in different contexts, reinterpreting popular culture genres from cartoons to action movie posters on her own terms.

Up in the air, she dispatches a fat white guy to deep space like Wonder Woman or Superman. Red-eyed and snarling, she towers over Times Square like Godzilla. She also stands tall in front of a burning cross, her arm raised in a black power salute, skulks through a Greek temple flanked by muscular henchmen or repels meteorites in a single blow, while standing before a huge stone swastika.

These images have been patched together on a computer and their sheer aggressiveness is hard to beat, but they are also superficial, devoid of the depth of Ms. Cox's earlier work. It may be that a burning cross or a stone swastika is incendiary and formulaic, whether it backs Ms. Cox or Jean-Claude Van Damme. Gender and race can change, irony can increase, but the exploitation and two-dimensionality can remain much the same, as real movies regularly demonstrate.

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