

ART REVIEWS

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Work by two women who made figurative paintings in the '50s; short films and videos about black culture; and a painter's intermingling of contemporary and historical art.

July 9, 2019

Mimi Gross and Marcia Marcus

Through July 27. Shirley Fiterman Art Center, 81 Barclay Street, Manhattan; 212-776-6237, bmcc.cuny.edu/sfac.

Titled "Double Portrait," this electrifying exhibition unites Mimi Gross and Marcia Marcus, who began making figurative paintings in the 1950s. Born 12 years apart, Ms. Marcus and Ms. Gross crossed paths in downtown New York, as well as on sojourns to Italy and Provincetown. Both were putting paint to canvas at a time when Minimalism and Conceptualism reigned supreme, and both were interested in representations of their gender.



The art of Mimi Gross, the other focus of this exhibition, includes two works based on Delacroix's painting "Women of Algiers." This one, "Dark Air" (1980-81), uses mixed materials to update Delacroix's tableau.

Mimi Gross/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; via Eric Firestone Gallery; Jason Mandella

For Ms. Marcus, this interest manifests itself in cryptic, almost surreal self-portraits, done with a muted palette, in which the artist dresses up and poses with classical ruins, as if she were a goddess or guardian. Ms. Gross sometimes reinterprets famous art historical works, as in two massive takes on Delacroix's

“Women of Algiers” (1834). “Dark Air,” her roughly 9-by-9-foot construction that reimagines it with fashionable friends and riotous patterns, is a showstopper and the first piece you see upon entering the gallery.

Ms. Gross and Ms. Marcus frequently portrayed friends, family and acquaintances, including each other. They cultivated an intimacy that pushes against the cold monumentality of the canon. Today, when figurative painting has become a powerful province for artists who are not white, straight and male, this work feels as current as anything you would see in Chelsea. That is what makes it a revelation. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

‘Ebsploitation’

Through Aug. 3. Martos Gallery, 41 Elizabeth Street, Manhattan; 212-560-0670, martosgallery.com.



A scene from Devin Troy Strother's video "Watermelon in Three Acts" (2019), included in the show "Ebsploitation" at Martos Gallery. Devin Troy Strother and Marlborough Gallery

Blaxploitation emerged in the 1970s as a film genre that showcased black characters and communities but often trafficked in negative stereotypes. "Ebsploitation," at Martos Gallery, adjusts this perspective with 20 recent short films and videos and a title derived from the first name of Ebony L. Haynes, the show organizer and the gallery's director.

Black culture, history and trauma are central concerns here. Jazmine Haynes's "A Round of Applause" (2019) features Nina Simone and other black female performers, while "the worst witch" (2018), made by Devin Troy Strother, Alima Lee and Mandy Harris Williams, envisions "black magic" as empowering rather

than sinister. Alima Lee's "On matter(ing)" (2019) celebrates Black Lives Matter, and David Roy's "Peace Rocket" (2019) imagines a "black NASA." Black hair, laboring hands, dance, poetry and literature are highlighted in other films.

The exhibition, which takes about two hours and 40 minutes to view in its entirety, meanders at times, with too many abstract, delirious, dreamlike sequences in succession. The show is noteworthy, however, for highlighting work that uses moving images to amend how blackness has been transmitted historically, and it corrects, with modest ambition, blaxploitation and its less affirmative legacies. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

'Visible Traces (Mountain Water Air)'

Through Aug. 9. Lévy Gorvy, 909 Madison Avenue, Manhattan; 212-772-2004, levygorvy.com.



This show, which combines contemporary art and historical works, juxtaposes a 1983 map of the world by Alighiero Boetti, left, with a 19th-century power sculpture by a Kongo artist.

Alighiero Boetti/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, via SIAE, Rome; Farzad Owrang

A painter of propulsive, shimmering abstractions that suggest waterfalls or geysers, Pat Steir has organized this manifold, centuries-spanning poem of cultural exchange and spiritual authority. Across two floors of this gallery, she has intermingled works by her contemporaries (Stanley Whitney, Terry Winters) and earlier titans of abstract art (Cy Twombly, Agnes Martin) with several historical works, including a hanging scroll from 1760s Japan that depicts a solitary scholar's hermitage as a curtain of gray brush strokes. The scroll's themes of nature and incorporeality — and how solitude can dissolve the

observed world into abstraction — resound in the company of a hushed, small-scale painting by Brice Marden; two larger works of rich blue stripes by Mary Heilmann; and four ink paintings of fish by Joan Jonas, whose calligraphic simplicity explicitly draws on the Japanese ink painting tradition.

Colonial violence and artistic opposition cross paths in Ms. Steir's sensational pairing of a commanding, nail-studded power sculpture (nkisi), made by a Kongo artist in the 19th century, and an Alighiero Boetti tapestry of a political world map, made in 1983 in collaboration with female weavers in Afghanistan. On the other side of the same gallery hangs yet another gray ink painting: a tangle of explosions and erasures by Julie Mehretu that reaffirms the political and celestial force of an art transcending the world as it is. *JASON FARAGO*

Ragnar Kjartansson

Through Sept. 2. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan; 212-535-7710, metmuseum.org.



An installation view of Ragnar Kjartansson's "Death Is Elsewhere," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Kellen Anna-Marie

The first thing you notice about Ragnar Kjartansson's "Death Is Elsewhere" is its incongruity. This multichannel video sits in a temporary black room built right into the atrium of the Lehman Wing of the Metropolitan Museum, where it's surrounded by the Rembrandts, Vermeers and other Dutch masters that were recently rehung as the show "In Praise of Painting." Seven huge, free-standing screens surround visitors with a misty green meadow view. Marching around the field are four musicians — two sets of mixed-sex twins — playing a brief but endlessly looping song built on the key phrase "Death is elsewhere as long as you want."

Luckily, incongruity is the point. The lyric and the musicians' tendency to disappear and reappear as they move from frame to frame both evoke the impossibility of grasping death while you're still alive. This dance also takes place at Eldhraun, site of a historically destructive volcanic explosion, in the middle of one of Iceland's white summer nights. And whether the dichotomy is life and death, or cynicism and sincerity, the implication is that one side's inability to make sense of the other doesn't invalidate either: We can still sing, make art and tell jokes. *WILL HEINRICH*

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Correction: July 9, 2019

An earlier version of a picture caption misidentified the artist of a 1983 map of the world currently on view at Lévy Gorvy. The artist is Alighiero Boetti, not Farzad Owrang. (Mr. Owrang is a photographer who took the installation image for the gallery.)