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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in December

By Roberta Smith, Martha Schwendener, Walker Mimms, Travis Diehl and Max Lakin

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Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Check out Eric N. Mack's fabric assemblages or Trey Abdella's category-defying works in Chelsea; Liz Deschenes' minimalist landscapes on the Lower East Side; John Wesley's pastel cartoons on the Upper East Side; and Daniel Arnold's photographs in Chinatown.

Newly Reviewed

CHELSEA

Erik N. Mac

Through Dec. 22. Paula Cooper, 521 West 21st Street, Manhattan, 212-255-1105, paulacoopergallery.com.

Eric N. Mack, “4 Joe Mack,” 2023, fabric on aluminum stretcher. Eric N. Mack, via Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo by Steven Probert.

In a manner of speaking, it is time for Eric N. Mack’s close-up: his first sizable solo in a New York gallery. For over a decade, Mack has been navigating the sprawling area shared by painting, sculpture, installation, textile design and fashion. But so far his appearances here have mostly occurred in one or two pieces at a time, either in numerous group shows (including the 2019 Whitney Biennial) or the occasional single installation, like ones at the Brooklyn Museum and the Jeffrey Stark Gallery, also in 2019.

At Paula Cooper, nine pieces — including “2 Time (Sly),” a smallish hanging piece of crisscrossing swaths of orange and blue — permit a new intimacy with Mack’s sensibility: his selections of fabric for visual and symbolic effect; his use of the needle arts and other techniques; his approach-avoidance relationship with painting and, similarly, to his use of the wall and interior space.

The quilt-like “Mary” juxtaposes a yellow plaid that incorporates the colors of the Pan-African flag with a muted upholstery fabric suggestive of staid, well-behaved American interiors and values. The mostly red or printed fabrics of “Rock river melody,” are stitched into a relieflike physicality, while their motifs (palm

trees, fruit and maybe two female profiles) bring to mind Gauguin. The outstanding work here is “4 Joe Mack,” in which stretcher and wall are partly exposed and various long pieces of fabric converge at a center where quilting and ruching are irreverently evoked. Convergence is the name of Mack’s very lively game. *ROBERTA SMITH*

LOWER EAST SIDE

Liz Deschenes

Through Dec. 23. Miguel Abreu, 88 Eldridge Street, 212-995-1774, miguelabreugallery.com.

Installation view of Liz Deschenes’ show “Gravity’s Pull” at Miguel Abreu Gallery. Liz Deschenes, via Miguel Abreu Gallery Photo by Stephen Faught

Liz Deschenes’ luminous exhibition “Gravity’s Pull” is about photography — although, as you might expect of Deschenes, traditional images are nowhere in sight. Instead, she mines optical devices from earlier centuries that changed the way we view the world. This show focuses on two such instruments: colored filters and the “Claude glass” (named after the French pastoral-landscape painter Claude Lorrain), a palm-size convex mirror of polished black obsidian that artists and tourists would take into landscapes, turning their backs on the view to admire the simplified reflection.

At the front of the gallery, Deschenes’ meditative installation mimics the obsidian mirror with rectangles of black cast glass mounted in wooden frames. In the main gallery, panels of Gorilla Glass — the scratch-resistant surface used for iPhone screens — are printed in hues inspired by early color filters and suspended throughout the space, creating a modern minimalist landscape.

The conceptual payoff here is as rich as the visual one. History is filled with technological devices that have been ridiculed even as they coincided with profound cultural shifts. Anecdotes of 18th-century tourists stumbling around with their Claude glasses are not so different from 21st-century selfie mishaps. The Claude glass and colored filters, however, appeared when the bucolic landscapes seen in paintings were being replaced by factories and mines. Similarly, we know smartphones are not innocent devices: They're as insidious and powerful as gravity's pull. In this sense Deschenes' work functions like a Claude glass, offering a beautifully rational vision, with art and technical apparatuses once again mediating our experience of the world. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

UPPER EAST SIDE

John Wesley

Through Jan. 26. Elkon Gallery, 18 East 81st Street, Manhattan; 212-535-3940, elkongallery.com.

John Wesley, "Tour de France," 1974, on view at Elkon Gallery. The Elkon Gallery

"Utter sweetness crossed with an underlying eroticism" is how the critic Peter Schjeldahl, writing in The New York Times 50 years ago, described the up-and-coming Pop artist John Wesley.

Wesley, who died last year at 93, borrowed images from comics, domestic romance and Americana, then arranged them into flat, pastel cartoons suffused with sexualized humor. Think Ken Price's interiors or Alex Katz's faces, with a Freudian tingle.

Whimsy abounds in the 15 works at Elkon Gallery. "Boxing Gloves" (1968) lines up three fighters like Rockettes, each engulfed to his waist by a black glove, with the lace from the glove binding his legs.

But more than bondage, this family-friendly selection boasts Wesley's play with form — the reason, I imagine, why the arch-minimalist Donald Judd devoted a gallery to him in Marfa.

Up close, Wesley's outline wavers wildly. From afar, it lands with surprising, loaded precision. While the eight cyclists of "Tour de France" (1974), hunched illogically, barely kiss the edge of their painted frame, one front-runner's tire flops over the guideline as if to announce, "I'm winning!" In "George Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1976), a sendup of Emmanuel Leutze's epic across the street at the Met, two patriots regain their footing in a wobbly dinghy. Overhead, a long cloud intrudes upon the myth, connecting left margin to right with a bridge of clean, unpainted gesso.

Outlines, placements, perimeters — each fourth-wall breaking. The effect is of someone who worked quickly (in fast-drying acrylics) and whose visions were informed by an intrusive American memory. *WALKER MIMMS*

CHELSEA AND LOWER EAST SIDE

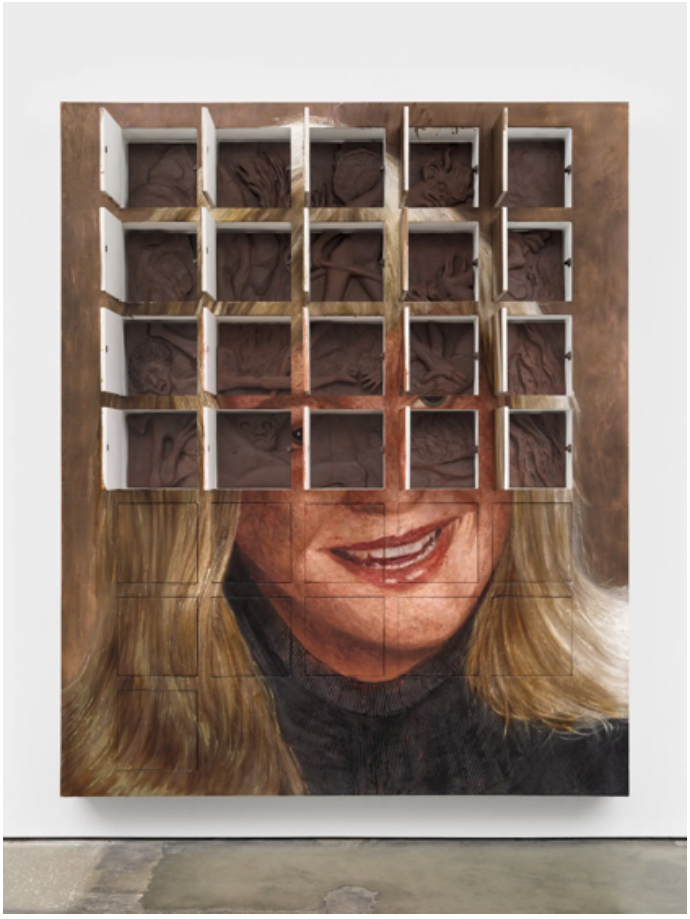
Trey Abdella

Through Jan. 13. Vito Schnabel, 455 West 19th Street, Manhattan; 646-216-3932, vitoschnabel.com.

Through Dec. 22. David Lewis, 57 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-966-7991, davidlewisgallery.com.

Trey Abdella “Under The Skin,” 2023, at David Lewis Gallery. Trey Abdella via David Lewis

Trey Abdella’s work attacks the idea of “surface.” In both of the show’s venues, portraits of women have been perforated by small doors, swung open one a day to reveal fragrant hunks of chocolate. An 8-by-6-foot canvas, encrusted with epoxy, foam, glitter and acrylic paint, gives a macro view of a slice of cherry pie — an animated sparkle, displayed on a whirling 3-D “hologram fan,” marks the fork piercing the crust. Thick dioramas show a monstrous sculpted trout breaching a lake’s plastic surface, or a rubber heart throbbing inside a treehouse seen through the slats of a rib cage. Piling gunk onto, cutting through, rejecting the limits of: No picture plane is safe.



Trey Abdella, “Live Laugh Love,” 2023, at Vito Schnabel Gallery. Trey Abdella, via Vito Schnabel Gallery, Photo by Shark Senesac

But Abdella also needs surfaces — his sculptures cling to the wall, and every bizarre scene depends on the viewer’s gaze having an image to penetrate. The horrific “Sealed With a Kiss” comprises an acrylic painting of white skin, on which perches a spiny, motorized mosquito the size of a corgi. Its rubbery proboscis visibly draws red fluid through the canvas into its transparent abdomen, then spits it back into some hidden reservoir. The pièce de résistance, though (at David Lewis — the only free-standing piece), is a looming cross-section of human skin blended with a model town — a scale railroad loops around the paper lawn beneath cloudlike pockets of yellow fat, while rabbit warrens mottle the soil underneath. Abdella’s work explodes what we take for 2-D to expose its texture, gore and depth, and dwells there. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHINATOWN

Daniel Arnold

Through Dec. 22. New York Life Gallery, 167-169 Canal Street, Floor 5, Manhattan; 917-472-7880, newyorklifegallery.com.

Daniel Arnold, “Central Park (Sheep Meadow),” 2017. Daniel Arnold, via New York Life Gallery

Unease colors Daniel Arnold’s photographs in his show “New York Life.” He’s drawn to the city’s characters, the sort whose ranks used to be better represented. His New York is both hostile and harbor to them. Arnold’s images can be harsh, the way the city is often harsh. The potential for violence is always around a grime-streaked corner: A man has his wound stanched on the sidewalk; a couple embrace on the street, watching smoke choke their apartment building.

Arnold takes from his forebears — Helen Levitt’s affinity for kids, Diane Arbus’s for misfits. In style and temperament, he’s somewhere between Garry Winogrand’s smash-and-grab and Lee Friedlander’s deadpan social landscape, more interested in terse ironies than beauty, which in the stilled energy of a street scene often end up being the same thing.

His pictures are undeniably of their place — Canal Street bootleggers and pretzel vendors and Times Square signage seized mid-scroll to read HELL. Yet they refuse any postcard prettiness, instead making room for the truth of the city, which is its people (Winogrand: “When I’m photographing, I don’t see photographs. I see faces.)

The images here are a touch over-reliant on punchlines — the sour-laced humor of someone behaving badly: a boy slickly flipping the bird, a child neck-deep in a corner store’s sickly-lit ice cream freezer. (Sometimes that’s Arnold himself, juxtaposing a man with satellite dish ears under a marquee for Atomic Wings.) But in their insistence on both the inescapable indignities and small pleasures of being alive, they’re resolutely human. *MAX LAKIN*

Last Chance

CHELSEA

Keltie Ferris

Through Dec. 9. Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-7400, miandn.com.

Keltie Ferris, “The Traumatics,” 2023, oil, powdered pigment and vinyl paint on canvas. via Keltie Ferris and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

The ecstasy that the Brooklyn-based painter Keltie Ferris finds in color recalls Matisse. His willingness to explore the possibilities of a particular tool through painting mirrors Jasper Johns. His nods to digital culture and use of the grid suggest an affinity with Albert Oehlen and, more so, Laura Owens, as in “sWISHes” (2023), a loose tangle of squiggles — a not-quite calligraphy of yellow and aqua spray paint — that dances atop a field of squares in a variety of contrasting colors predominated by blue on pink. The

resulting painting strikes a delicate harmonious cohesion, cleverly creating a sense of depth and motion, with no real-world referent, except maybe pixels and graffiti. If “sWISHes” is a painting *of* anything it may be this: a dogged belief that painting at this late stage still has a future.

Three of the strongest paintings incorporate the body-print method Ferris has adapted from Johns and David Hammons — a technique of oiling the body, impressing it on canvas and then using powdered pigments to create an image. In “The Traumatics” (2023), the artist’s imprinted body moves rhythmically across the canvas from warm reds and yellows to cool blues on a black ground. A pair of jeans pops legibly at the center, as iconic as any of Richard Prince’s cowboys.

In the dozen paintings on view, Ferris uses spray guns, oil sticks and brushes, palette knives for building up and scraping away, as well as his body in paintings that explore what possibilities the medium may yet yield. *JOHN VINCLER*

MIDTOWN

‘Modern-ish: Yonia Fain and the Art History of Yiddishland’

Through Dec. 8. The James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, first floor, Manhattan; 212-817-2020, centerforthehumanities.org.

Yonia Fain’s “Holocaust,” n.d., at James Gallery. Hofstra University Museum of Art, via James Gallery

Israel has been the focal point of the post-Holocaust Jewish narrative, but the history and reality of Jewish life are much more diffuse and diverse than one country. At last year's Venice Biennale, the artist Yevgeniy Fiks and the curator Maria Veits celebrated the richness of the diaspora with the Yiddishland Pavilion, conjuring an imaginary place flourishing with Yiddish culture. After showing that project, the James Gallery is now hosting another piece of Yiddishland: "Modern-ish," an exhibition devoted to the poet and artist Yonia Fain.

Fain was born in 1914 in Ukraine, but because of war and political conflict, immigrated to Poland, Lithuania, Japan, China and Mexico (where he befriended Diego Rivera). In 1953 he moved to New York, staying until his death in 2013. None of his art from before World War II survived, so the show features later paintings and drawings, alongside poetry and ephemera.

Standing in the gallery, I quickly understood the title's "-ish." Fain used modernist tools — abstraction, dynamic brushwork, a muted palette — not to pursue formalism or universal truths, but to unpack Jewish experiences. The largest painting, "Holocaust" (n.d.), is a frenetic burst of indecipherable shapes — a more dire, Futurist-inflected take on "Guernica." Poems translated from Yiddish by Sheva Zucker offer a glimpse of Fain's meditative relationship with both art and religion. In one, he asserts that he's not "the burned feet of Jewish shoes in holocaust museums." Instead, he writes, "I'm the lost wick / And the wound / That doesn't heal." *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

FLATIRON DISTRICT

'We didn't ask permission, we just did it …'

Through Dec. 8. Mishkin Gallery, 135 East 22nd Street, Manhattan; 646-660-6653, mishkingallery.baruch.cuny.edu.

Installation view of the exhibition “We didn’t ask permission, we just did it …,” featuring the Gran Tropical Bienal section at Mishkin Gallery. via Baruch Gallery, Photo: Isabel Asha Penzlien

Six years ago, Puerto Rico endured the perfect storm of Hurricane Maria and a fiscal crisis, while decolonization discourse peaked on the mainland. But the art scene there has long been grass roots and adaptable. Embajada (or “Embassy”), the curatorial moniker of Manuela Paz and Christopher Rivera, ambitiously take the recent history of Puerto Rican biennials to Manhattan, with a survey of work previously included in three series of international group shows staged between 2000 and 2016. The artists and issues that emerged there remain active and acute. Several participants, like Edra Soto and Daniel Lind-Ramos, have appeared lately in big Caribbean surveys at the Whitney and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The show at Mishkin provides some background.

At the gallery, a line of rolled coins snakes around a vitrine of ephemera. The Mexican artist Damián Ortega produced “100 dólares de dieta” for the first PR Invitational by living without cash and exchanging his $100 stipend for 10,000 pennies. The Gran Tropical Bienal embraced beaches and jungles, represented here by “Escuela de Oficios,” the cattail-fiber mat and crates of printed matter of an outdoor library by Jorge González Santos. On the wall, the mesh “Ponchos Anti-Zika” by Jessica Kairé embody the specter of fever. Mike Egan organized the three Cave-In shows in a cavern that once sheltered nationalist rebels. Artists like Rivera, Andra Ursuta and Candice Lin produced work in situ. Andy Meerow pasted the rock with posters reading “Wet Pain”; on Mishkin’s walls, that raw message hits home. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

MIDTOWN EAST

‘What Models Make Worlds: Critical Imaginaries of A.I.’

Through Dec. 9. Ford Foundation Gallery, 320 East 43rd Street, Manhattan; 212-573-5000, fordfoundation.org.

Left, Stephanie Dinkins's video "Conversations with Bina48 (Fragment 11)," 2014-ongoing. At right, "Not the Only One (N'TOO), Avatar, V1," 2023 (Data 2018-ongoing). via Ford Foundation Gallery

This show asks a timely question: Does the software underlying the technology we use — what some broadly, darkly call the Algorithm — have unintended consequences? Yes. We know, for example, that biased datasets can lead facial recognition systems to misidentify Black faces more often than white ones. Skewed models, as the show's title implies, make unjust worlds. But as these 16 artists here dig deeper, the question quickly becomes a problem: What can art do about it?

Some pieces take a didactic approach. A spoken word video by Joy Buolamwini and the Algorithmic Justice League builds on Allison Koenecke's research on voice assistants like Siri: trained on white English, they're thrown by accents. Others try visual pleasure. Morehshin Allahyari's image-generating software fills a screen with gently morphing, ambiguously gendered portraits based on Iranian paintings from the 18th to 20th centuries, a gesture toward diversifying non-Western examples to the canon's dataset.

People aren't logical; computers are. The most dynamic works here explore their interface. A video depicts part of Stephanie Dinkins's long-running conversation (2014-present) with Bina48, a "social robot" that resembles a Black woman but isn't programmed with that self-knowledge. As if filling that gap, but in a consciously constrained way, Dinkins trained her own chatbot using oral histories from her female relatives. Represented on a monitor as a brown face floating in a nimbus of hair, the A.I. responds slowly, cryptically or not at all.

The show is uneven, but worth seeing for its central insight: Software models answers, while art makes questions. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHINATOWN

Ser Serpas

Through Dec. 9. Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, 55 Hester Street, Manhattan; 917-675-6681, maxwellgraham.biz.

Installation view of “Tool,” Ser Serpas’s exhibition at Maxwell Graham Gallery. via Ser Serpas and Maxwell Graham Gallery, New York

Ser Serpas is never boring. In what is advertised as an exhibition of paintings, she has created an installation environment that works primarily as sculpture. The paintings wobble between abstraction and figuration. With earth tones and red predominating, they’re flat and primitive, fleshly and evocative — like ancient cave paintings but of femme seated nudes.

Serpas has installed 16 of 17 of the show’s paintings (all untitled, all 2023) on or within a large white cube, which rests atop an array of saw horses and stools in the rear of the gallery. The cube’s top and back wall are missing, a fact that the viewer realizes when walking around the structure.

While you pass through the narrow corridor formed by the side of the cube and the gallery wall, the large pictures hung on the cube’s exterior wall are viewable only from up close. Once behind the cube, the missing back wall reveals a sort of diorama of an artist’s studio. With attentive looking, relationships between the various depicted bodies become apparent. A figure on a wood panel was seemingly used to imprint a mirrored impression on another painting’s canvas. One painting appears to have been painted through a lace curtain onto a surface below, thus creating two nonidentical twinned surfaces. All this suggests a rubbing of bodies against bodies — painterly procreation on display — within Serpas’s casually ingenious spatial configuration.

A museum should snatch up the entire assemblage, which manages to mine new possibilities for painting. *JOHN VINCLER*

FINANCIAL DISTRICT

Nancy Holt

Through Dec. 7. Dunkunsthalle, 64 Fulton Street, Manhattan; 201-898-2863, dunkunsthalle.com.

Still from Nancy Holt's 1973 black-and-white video, "Zeroing In." Holt/Smithson Foundation/Licensed by Artists Rights Society, New York; via Electronic Arts Intermix, New York and Video Data Bank, Chicago

If you know one work by Nancy Holt, it's "Sun Tunnels" — four large concrete pipes in the Utah desert, aligned to solar cycles and perforated with the patterns of constellations. If you know another, it's probably "East Coast/West Coast," a video in which Holt and her husband, the land artist Robert Smithson, parody the poles of late 1960s art — he (West) swoons about LSD, sunshine and candy apple finishes, while she (East) demands a rigorous, systematic approach to knowledge. (The artist Joan Jonas plays a third wheel.)

The 1969 video appears at Dunkunsthalle, an artist-run space in an abandoned doughnut shop, in the show "Perspectives," alongside a lush, step-by-step 1978 documentary about constructing "Sun Tunnels." It's the third work, though, that underlines how deftly Holt danced between rigor and awe. "Zeroing In," from 1973, consists of Holt and the critic Frederick Ted Castle in voice-over trying to discern parts of a grayscale video of a cityscape, viewed through a series of round holes in a black card.

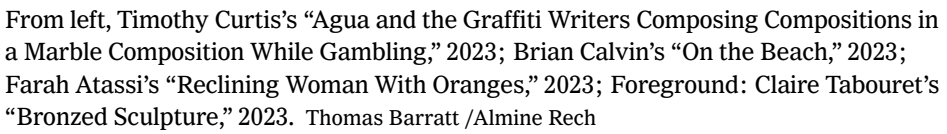
Their dialogue is an exercise in skirting the obvious conclusions as they try to unsee what are plainly cars, sidewalks and skyscrapers. Put another way, like the round, astronomically aligned apertures in "Sun Tunnels," the holes in the card serve as instruments for reorienting your perspective (which, again, is the exhibition's title). In only three works, this show offers a multifaceted picture of how Holt embraced both "East Coast" and "West Coast" tendencies: To her, "systems" weren't constraints, but instruments for reaching cosmic vistas. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

More to See

TRIBECA AND UPPER EAST SIDE

'The Echo of Picasso'

Through Dec. 16. Almine Rech, 361 Broadway & 39 East 78th Street, Floor 2, Manhattan; 212-804-8496, alminerech.com



From left, Timothy Curtis's "Agua and the Graffiti Writers Composing Compositions in a Marble Composition While Gambling," 2023; Brian Calvin's "On the Beach," 2023; Farah Atassi's "Reclining Woman With Oranges," 2023; Foreground: Claire Tabouret's "Bronzed Sculpture," 2023. Thomas Barratt /Almine Rech

This juicy two-venue show joins the caravan of appraisals timed to the 50th anniversary of Picasso's death — MoMA, Gagosian Pace and Skarstedt all have shows on view, after the Hannah Gadsby 20-car pileup at the Brooklyn Museum earlier this year. The choices here stress the debt that contemporary art

owes the master, a shadow whose length has proved inescapable. As a curatorial exercise, it's sound in most of the showy selections (George Condo, Francis Bacon), others only if you squint (a Jeff Koons Split-Rocker), and some not even then (a blue-cast Urs Fischer strains).

Much of the work, which naturally favors painting, evinces clear stylistic or compositional Picasso flourishes, some obvious (Cubist guitars, wonky eyes), others, like Joe Andoe's deadpan "Me copying Twombly painting Picasso" (2011), with conceptual humor. (Twombly's 1988 facsimile of Picasso's 1939 "Femme à la Couronne des Fleurs" is on view in an expanded version of this show at the Museo Picasso Málaga.) Works like Louise Bourgeois's "Portrait of C.Y." (1947-1949) display subtler influence, internalizing Picasso's approach to exploding and reassembling the body. Critiques are softly encoded, as in the inclusion of a de Kooning sketch, implicitly linking his and Picasso's unsparing depiction of women. Rebecca Warren's clompy, attenuated bronzes have more fealty to Giacometti, though there's a bit of sendup of Picasso's obsession with masculine potency in her droopy "You Are Not TheRe" (2020).

There are a few Picassos — including an impressive late bather — but his presence here is largely as a benevolent ghost, still governing what is considered permissible. *MAX LAKIN*

UPPER EAST SIDE

'The History of Hand Knitting'

Through Dec. 15. Leo Koenig Inc., 958 Madison Avenue, Manhattan; 212-334-7866, leokoenig.com.

Nicole Eisenman "Untitled (Billy Clubs)," 2012, plaster on wood, at Leo Koenig Inc. Shark Senesac

So much of our suffering is caused by male aggression. (How many victims of war have been killed by women?) But for all the horror of that violence, there's often something oafish about it, if only because of the boundless stupidity it represents.

This two-woman show captures some of masculinity's toxic idiocy.

An untitled installation by Nicole Eisenman presents 20 "clubs" leaning against the wall. Each is just a length of scrap wood with a dumb blob of plaster at its top, as though its maker was either too lazy or too dimwitted to perfect his weapons beyond the minimum needed to bash a head. Nearby, also in plaster, a three-fingered blob of a hand sits on the floor, ready to grab at its clubs at the slightest provocation. ("You callin' ME a blob of a hand?!")

A blob of a head, about three feet tall and painted blue, looks on dimly from a pedestal, as though helpless to govern its own hand.

Rosemarie Trockel contributes quite different pieces to the show, but they hit similar notes. Back in 1984, she began to order up machine-knit balaclavas, like a terrorist or paramilitary fighter might wear. But instead of being bad-guy black, they had "girlish" patterns knit into them. My favorite covers its wearer's face in plus and minus signs, like the love charms worn by Frenchwomen that stand for "more than yesterday, less than tomorrow." It's not clear if Trockel's pattern counters the balaclava's associations with masculine threat, or if instead of pointing to a love that's bound to increase, it lets its wearer proclaim a hatred that's always on the rise. *BLAKE GOPNIK*

TRIBECA

Duane Linklater

Through Dec. 21. Bortolami (the Upstairs), 39 Walker Street, Manhattan. 212-727-2050; bortolamigallery.com.

Installation view of Duane Linklater's show "Dressing," at Bortolami (the Upstairs). via Duane Linklater and Bortolami, New York; Photo by Guang Xu

Duane Linklater begins his latest show, "Dressing," with a nod to the conceptual sculpture of David Hammons: a mink skin hanging on the wall with a black bicycle seat for a face. Though more earnest than a Hammons, it works with a similar logic — that of a joke that isn't joking — and shows the same breezy confidence vis-à-vis art history. But for Linklater, an Omaskêko Ininiwak artist who lives and works in North Bay, Ontario, the simmering undercurrent, even more than race, is *place:* He's always attuned to the context, social, cultural and geographic as well as racial, in which he works.

The show's largest pieces are five wooden scaffolds that reach nearly to the ceiling and are arranged hard against the windows. Draped over each is a length of diaphanous white polyester treated with cochineal, charcoal and bleach, backed with an opaque white tarp and secured with bright orange clamps. On one, a light shimmer of pink is marked with white wrinkles; on another, a beetlike color with bubbling black edges ebbs in from the sides.

Like conventional stretched paintings, they reward close looking; but they're also there to make their wooden supports look like easels, drying racks or even temporary buildings that take possession of the gallery, if not the whole neighborhood. At the same time, a few precarious gestures — one curtain draped just so across a bar; a bundle of eagle feathers left in a water glass nearby — emphasize just how transient such possession really is. *WILL HEINRICH*

EAST VILLAGE

Ali Cherri

Through Jan. 7. Swiss Institute, 38 St. Marks Place, Manhattan; 212-925-2035; swissinstitute.net.

Still from “Of Men and Gods and Mud,” 2022, a three-channel video installation in Ali Cherri’s show “Humble and Quiet and Soothing as Mud.” Daniel Pérez/Swiss Institute

On the second floor of Ali Cherri’s exhibition “Humble and Quiet and Soothing as Mud,” there is a video projected onto three screens. Titled “Of Men and Gods and Mud” (2022), it shows laborers fashioning mud into bricks who toil in the shadow of the Merowe Dam in northern Sudan, the construction of which displaced about 50,000 people and caused significant social and environmental upheaval.

Women’s voices (one speaking English, one Arabic) narrate: “Somewhere, by the banks of a great river, on the banks of a gargantuan dam, a man stands waist deep in mud. …” The language seems less documentary than mythic, akin to the many creation stories (Sumerian, Abrahamic, Maori, Hindu, Yoruba) in which the material plays a central role. The effect is to telescope time, so that contemporary geopolitical and environmental catastrophes are read against primeval creation and destruction — perhaps, the Lebanese-born Cherri suggests, we are living in another antediluvian moment, just before the dam breaks.

Mud — as material and symbol — is also explored in four sculptures on the ground floor related to the ancient Sumerian hero Gilgamesh and the molding of his companion, Enkidu, who was molded from clay. Despite their seeming fragility, these figures cast fierce-looking shadows on the walls. Standing in for their faces are archaeological relics — from Egypt, Mali, the Kongo kingdom, France — that the artist bought from auctions, their prices reflecting current monetary and cultural valuations. In Cherri’s work, past and present are never separate or even distant — a gently devastating argument against the idea that as a species, we’ve progressed. *ARUNA D’SOUZA*

SOHO

Candice Lin

Through Dec. 16. Canal Projects, 351 Canal Street, Manhattan; 646-389-2153, canalprojects.org.

Candice Lin's installation "Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory" (2023) at Canal Projects. via Candice Lin and François Ghebaly Gallery; Photo by Izzy Leung/Canal Projects

The title of Candice Lin's new show, "Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory," is the first hint that it relishes in impish chaos. A second clue comes in the form of sounds and smells: clacking and whirring, as well as the faint odor of mugwort, vinegar and essential oils. The source of all this is a rowdy, room-size installation that features giant ceramic urns, metal workstations, industrial tubing, herbal tinctures and candles.

Wall text leads us to imagine the space as a lithium battery factory that becomes the site of a demonic visitation. Near the center of the gallery, stairs lead to an elevated observation room, where visitors can try out the vantage point of a factory manager surveilling employees from above. Below it, a red-lit crawl space — surrounded by tapestries depicting demons that resemble the monsters of various East Asian myths — offers glimpses of a more mystical world to those deciding to crouch down and prowl around.

Lin is among a generation of terrific artists training their sights on the ruinous effects of industrialization and global trade on local cultures. Her current project draws inspiration from anthropological case studies of Malaysian female factory workers who have reported spirit possessions while sometimes also falling ill to job-site toxins. But even rooted as it is in scholarly research, Lin's artwork is anything but rational. It is joyfully nonlinear and inexplicable, not to mention noisy and pungent, too. *DAWN CHAN*

SOHO

'Wild Style 40'

Through Jan. 13. Jeffrey Deitch, 18 Wooster Street, Manhattan; 212-343-7300, deitch.com.

Installation view of “Wild Style 40” at Jeffrey Deitch, New York. Genevieve Hanson/Jeffrey Deitch, New York

Shot in 1980 in No Wave’s deliberate anti-style, “Wild Style,” Charlie Ahearn’s loosely stitched film of early hip-hop culture among the Bronx’s bombed-out blocks, trades auteurism for zeal, ceding conventions like script and plot to the pure invention of its stars. It documents the progenitors of hip-hop — graffitists, MCs, and b-boys — and is itself a foundational article of that culture, pointed to as legitimizing evidence of a movement whose effects continue to color the city’s self-image.

This show straddles memorabilia — production stills by Martha Cooper and Cathleen Campbell; Zephyr and Revolt’s fizzy title card animation cels — and the output of the film’s aerosol contingent who transitioned from train yards to gallery walls, a codified roster of artists often named in the same breath: Lee Quiñones, Rammellzee, Sharp, Daze, Crash, Lady Pink, Futura, Dondi and Phase 2. Also included are artists like Martin Wong and John Ahearn, who didn’t work in the mode but are considered sympathetic to it. The split is between nostalgia and continuum. A sullen, jaundiced KAWS bronze is the most conspicuous example of the movement’s legacy, even as he has long abandoned his tagger roots. Its presence represents the completion of the formal art world’s incursion, a process that the film treated with subtle ambivalence.

There is a joyousness in the longevity of style writing’s surviving pioneers. But if the form’s chief characteristic is its endless reinvention, you only need to walk around the corner to Thompson Street, to an empty lot ringed with fresh tags, to find the tradition alive. *MAX LAKIN*

CHINATOWN

Joseph J. Greer

Through Dec. 17. Hyacinth, 179 Canal St. #4B, Manhattan; 646-589-6763, hyacinthgallery.com.

Joseph J. Greer's "Uncanny Silicon Valley Girl," 2023, in his show "Cache Nexus." via Joseph J. Greer and Hyacinth Gallery

Each of Joseph J. Greer's six wall-mounted, laser-cut steel sculptures, bolted together layer by baffling layer, follows the same plan: The simple bulk of the composition mimics the copper on a credit card's microchip, while the tops and sides unfurl into steampunk Swiss army knives. Like Rothko painting a series of double rectangles, Greer ekes out a range of formal possibilities within these two zones. He punches out segments of the globelike chips here, adopts obsolete designs there; swaps the implements jutting from the hinges in shapes evoking oversized blades and can openers, but also sprocket holes and safety pins.

In "Uncanny Silicon Valley Girl" (all the pieces have punny titles), you can find a three-prong outlet, an airplane, and cross hairs. As your eye explores the strata, it's easy to forget that the scale is all wrong: The microchips are macro, and the various tools and symbols out of proportion. You'd never take Greer's sculpture off the wall to saw firewood or buy a latte, but the symbols still symbolize. Which might be why the use of steel is so effective; we get older, chips get tinier, but there's an industrial nostalgia to the felty softness of rust or the fuchsia and cyan rainbows that bloom on stainless steel at high temperatures. It's similarly touching that an artist would aim contemporary fabrication methods at the quaint problem of self-expression within an inimitable style. "We used to make things in this country," you can almost hear Greer say. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

LOWER EAST SIDE

Qualeasha Wood

Through Dec. 16. Gallery Kendra Jayne Patrick, 178 Norfolk Street, Manhattan; gallerykendrajaynepatrick.com.

Qualeasha Wood, “System Maintenance,” 2023, on view at Gallery Kendra Jayne Patrick. Ernst Fischer

The Jacquard loom, patented in 1804, not only revolutionized the production of textiles by automating it, but also inspired designs for early computers. It’s fitting, then, that the artist Qualeasha Wood’s Jacquard tapestries are images of complex digital displays. By translating the contents of her desktop into woven cloth, she’s closing the loop on a long cycle.

Momentum has been building around Wood’s art since it was featured in the magazine Art in America in 2021; last year, when she was just 25, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired one of her pieces. But this exhibition, titled “Manic Pixie Magical Negro,” is one of her first solo gallery shows. It’s every bit as good as I’d hoped.

To create her tapestries, Wood takes hundreds of selfies, which she collages, manipulates and layers in Photoshop; after her designs are woven at a mill, she hand-embellishes them with beads, often halos and stigmata. The finished products are whirling mash-ups of Catholic iconography and African American story quilts, filtered through a millennial sensibility.

My favorite piece in the show, “System Maintenance” (2023), contains a portrait of Wood staring out at the viewer. Her head is ringed by yellow beads and computer arrows, which lead our eye to a note that lists tasks for self-care. These include taking medicine and staying off social media. “Don’t look,” Wood writes — a clever play on the fact that just below, she is looking, with an unwavering gaze. Wood brings vulnerability to her works, but what comes through most strongly is her remarkable self-possession. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

CHELSEA

Anish Kapoor

Through Dec. 16. Lisson Gallery, 504-508 West 24th Street, Manhattan. 212-505-6431; lissongallery.com.

Installation view “Anish Kapoor,” an exhibition at Lisson Gallery that features works using the Vantablack nano-technology. Anish Kapoor. All Rights Reserved, DACS, London/ARS, NY, via Lisson Gallery

In 2016, Anish Kapoor struck a deal with Surrey NanoSystems that made him the only artist with access to Vantablack, the blackest synthetic material ever. Its closely set carbon nanotubes absorb nearly every photon that hits them, meaning that whatever you spray with a Vantablack coating, regardless of its shape or size, looks like a matte black hole without detail, depth or reflection. The artistic possibilities are limitless; Kapoor’s first idea was to put it on the face of a $95,000 luxury watch.

But he’s made some art works, too, which you can see in New York for the first time at Lisson Gallery. Shown alongside some large, overwrought paintings and a selection of larger black objects made of resin, canvas or fiberglass, the new Vantablack pieces, all titled “Non-Object Black,” are a pillar just over a foot

high; a similarly sized panel with two projecting hemispheres; another panel with a hat-like projection; and a two-foot diamond shape, each enclosed in the glass box in which it arrived from the fabricator. (The merest speck of dust, alighting on one of those dense, outer space-like surfaces, would ruin the effect.)

As art works, they're distinctly uninteresting, with little to offer beyond their material. But that material is like nothing I've seen before. I kept reaching for metaphors and finding they didn't fit: Was it lunar shadows made solid? A digital glitch that proves we inhabit a computer simulation? Rips in the very fabric of reality? Or just an unusual new chromatic effect that exposes the limits of human vision? *WILL HEINRICH*

MIDTOWN

Rineke Dijkstra

Through Dec. 20. Marian Goodman, 24 West 57th Street, Manhattan; 212-977-7160; mariangoodman.com.

Rineke Dijkstra's "Night Watching," 2019, three-channel HD video installation, with sound. Rineke Dijkstra; Photo by Lewis Ronald

In her entrancing 2019 video, "Night Watching," receiving its East Coast premiere at Goodman, Rineke Dijkstra documents the making of "The Night Watch," one of Rembrandt's greatest works. Of course, the paint was dry by 1642. What Dijkstra does is let us witness that utterly inanimate object — just a bunch of dead pigments on canvas — being made into living art, thanks to the viewers who engage with it as that.

Dijkstra made a record of that transformation, from object to art, at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, when she set up cameras in front of Rembrandt's painting and pointed them at people whom she invited to observe it.

Contemplating "The Night Watch" — or so we believe; Dijkstra never turns her lens toward the painting — a group of Japanese businessmen consider the picture in terms of the money Rembrandt might have made from it. "The gross profit margin must have been high," one says.

A half-dozen young artists also take in the old masterpiece, imagining what it must be to have a reputation like Rembrandt's. The anxiety of his influence rages among them.

Observing the rich and powerful men in the Rembrandt, a posse of Dutch women of power and wealth — tweed, pashmina, pearls — discuss gender roles in the Dutch Golden Age.

All these people must be witnessing art, because they have their own views of the object before them.

Then we realize: As we wrestle with our viewpoint on their reactions, we're making Dijkstra's document into art. *BLAKE GOPNIK*

UPPER EAST SIDE

'Edward Hopper as Puritan'

Through Feb. 17. Craig Starr Gallery, 5 East 73rd Street, Manhattan, 212-570-1739, craigstarr.com

Edward Hopper,'s "Two Puritans" (1945) at Craig Starr Gallery. Heirs of Josephine N.

Hopper/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

“Edward Hopper as Puritan” is a compact exhibition devoted to a world-famous American painter that nonetheless looks remarkably fresh. For one thing, its display of nine works mostly from the 1920s — etchings, watercolors, charcoal drawings and a single painting — in a tiny gallery encourages a thrilling intimacy with the changes in Hopper’s mark-making and surfaces across mediums.

The show concentrates on the more austere side of his sensibility, which is most evident in his nonurban scenes. Houses, sailboats and the ocean are the main characters; humans, if present, are dwarfed.

The etchings give early signs of Hopper’s powers of observation and touch: Their varied textures verge on flamboyant. In “The Henry Ford,” a schooner’s towering sails evoke an immense white bird settling into its nest. In contrast, the watercolors of saltboxes or a Victorian house abstain from the dazzling effects this medium encourages. The charcoals — another Victorian and a boat on a wharf — are so strikingly solid and finished they might be graphite.

“Two Puritans” (1945), the oil, depicts a pair of white houses whose awkward volumes flatten primly toward the picture plane and exemplify Hopper’s careful rhyming of colors. Everything is pristinely flat except on four trees, which scramble several hues into a bark-like roughness.

In the catalog’s exceptional essay, Louis Shadwick, a British art historian, explores the social and racial implications of terms like Puritan and Anglo-Saxon, which early writers applied admiringly to Hopper’s art. Combining a meticulous presentation of evidence with something like psychoanalysis, he reveals far more layers of political meaning than are usually achieved these days. *ROBERTA SMITH*

SOHO

Christian Walker

Through Jan. 7. Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, 26 Wooster Street, Manhattan; 212-431-2609, leslielohman.org.

Christian Walker, “Untitled (Boston’s Combat Zone),” circa 1979-83. via Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art

For reasons sometimes hard to know, treasurable artists drop from the radar. Having them back in sight is a gift and Leslie-Lohman Museum delivers one in “Christian Walker: The Profane and the Poignant,” a first survey of a photographer who had an art world presence in the 1980s and 1990s — he made a notable contribution to, among other shows, “Black Male” at the Whitney Museum — and has since been all but forgotten.

Born in 1953, Walker was active in Boston’s early gay liberation movement. His first major photographic series, “The Theater Project,” documented the city’s red-light district, the infamous Combat Zone, as it was known, that drew both gay and straight people. In his next series, “Miscegenation,” he took the intimate mingling of Black and white male bodies as a subject, at a time when the gay rights movement was largely white, and did so using an experimental technique of applying pigments directly to photographic prints.

Much of Walker’s career coincided with the AIDS crisis. The toll in lives it took, and the race-based inequities it revealed, became major themes for him. A larger consciousness of loss thrums through his art, evident in portraits of family and friends early and late. Eventually he became lost himself. In the mid-1990s, he moved to Seattle, where he cut off most of his East Coast contacts, lived for a time on the street, and died, most likely of a drug overdose, in 2003.

His work survives only in bits and pieces. The Leslie-Lohman show, organized by Jackson Davidow and Noam Parness, is an act of hunter-gatherer persistence, and a heroic one: a generous tribute to a memorable artist, and a gift to an audience for whom he has been restored. *HOLLAND COTTER*

COLD SPRING, N.Y.

Mario Schifano

Through Jan. 8. Magazzino Italian Art, 2700 Route 9, Cold Spring, N.Y.; 845-666-7202, magazzino.art.

A few of the many variations on the square, a shape that recalls tube televisions and abstract color fields, in “Mario Schifano: the Rise of the ’60s,” at Magazzino Italian Art. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome; Photo by Marco Anelli and Tommaso Sacconi, via Magazzino Italian Art

Pop Art finally arrived in 1962, when Andy Warhol and 28 playful upstarts, displaying their wares in “New Realists” at the Sidney Janis Gallery, drove Mark Rothko, the master of sober, hovering shapes of color, to leave the gallerist in a pique.

One New Realist must have needled with special force: the proto-punk Mario Schifano. For across the 80 works in his big new exhibition, “Mario Schifano: the Rise of the ’60s,” it becomes obvious that this Italian interpreter of Coca-Cola (a logo he loves to quote) understood the goals of Abstract Expressionism even while he mocked them.

As with Rothko, his muse was the square — just the wrong kind. In pencil Schifano drafts rounded squares inside crisp-cornered ones, replicating the era’s tube televisions. Into them he mortars sloppy brushloads of enamel paint, the pigment of outdoor signage. In “Elemento per Paesaggio” (1962), squares stack up helter-skelter, recalling TVs in a pawnshop window.

Elsewhere, color lampoons consumer choice. In two untitled works from 1961, one square wears a yellow-and-cobalt reminiscent of the Spam tin, while the other is done in the signature cream-and-crimson of Coke. Across each foreground, Schifano draws a cartoon rope seat and bucket, vacant, as if the billboard painter has just taken lunch.

Schifano knew that studio painting had, through reproduction, joined mass media. Where Rothko’s generation yearned for pure, unmediated color, Schifano submits to modernity’s mediator: the screen. It’s fitting that in the stillness of the Magazzino’s Brutalist pavilion, no titles or dates clutter the exhibition. For those, you must download the app. *WALKER MIMMS*

MIDTOWN

Alen MacWeeney

Through Jan. 7. New York Public Library, 476 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan; 917-275-6975, nypl.org/events/exhibitions.

Alen MacWeeney's "Looking Out, Looking In," 1977-79, in his show at the New York Public Library. Alen MacWeeney; via New York Public Library

Has there been another exhibition whose venue so perfectly suits its art? In one of the slender halls on the third floor of the New York Public Library's Fifth Avenue headquarters, a civic landmark, hang photos shot in the slender cars of the New York subway, another symbol of the city. Walk down the hall at N.Y.P.L., and you might be on a platform looking into a stopped train: In one car, a weary-looking straphanger scowls while a rider in a head scarf and coat looks beatific; in another, a young woman ogles a dandy.

The Irish photographer Alen MacWeeney, 84, took these 44 photos in 1977 after arriving in Manhattan to work for Richard Avedon. They nod to the subway shots of Walker Evans from four decades earlier, with one major difference: In most of them, MacWeeney cleverly enlarges two subway shots onto one sheet of photo paper; with no seam between them, they register as a continuous scene. That gives each print a subtle surrealism, as we absorb the breach in space and time across its two photos without recognizing that they began life separately: A woman rests her eyes in a car that, thanks to MacWeeney, appears to have expanded into a maze of graffitied walls; another car seems to show its inside and outside at once, like a Möbius strip.

“The chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table” — that phrase by Isidore Lucien Ducasse is supposed to capture surrealism’s signature weirdness. But what about the encounter of an umbrella with another moment in its own existence? That’s the more peculiar strangeness we find in MacWeeney’s subway. *BLAKE GOPNIK*

CHELSEA

Louise Bourgeois

Through Dec. 23. Hauser & Wirth, 443 West 18th Street, Manhattan; 212-542-5662; hauserwirth.com.

Louise Bourgeois, “The Fragile,” 2007, digital prints on fabric. The Easton Foundation/VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Hauser & Wirth, New York

“Once There Was a Mother,” a show of very late Louise Bourgeois drawings, prints and embroideries at Hauser & Wirth’s new 18th Street outpost, takes its name from a 1947 text she wrote and illustrated about a woman’s relationship with her son. (The new space, which includes a screening room, bookstore and reinstallation of the Roth Bar along with a comparatively modest viewing room, is dedicated to artists’ editions.) Despite the title — and despite depictions of babies floating on serpentine umbilicals, or naked fathers in explicit silhouette — the work’s emphasis is squarely on a woman’s own subjective experience of maternity.

In a 10-foot-high “Self Portrait,” in embroidery, watercolor and ink on fabric, birth hits a woman’s body as heavily, and ineluctably, as a train wreck. Small collaged images show a woman gestating and transforming around the circumference of a clock face, while at 12 o’clock, still pregnant, she’s throttled by a faceless, blood-red man. In “The Good Mother,” another blood-red stick figure discharges a silvery cloud of aluminum from one enormous breast. This one could be, if you want, a portrait of maternal claustrophobia, or of some primordial Jungian fertility symbol. But it could also be the way an artist, after living for nearly a century, cut straight through symbols and ideas to the carnal heart of a defining human experience. *WILL HEINRICH*

Closed

TRIBECA

Arthur Dove

Through Dec. 1. Schoelkopf, 390 Broadway, Manhattan; 212-879-8815, schoelkopfgallery.com.

Arthur Dove’s “Tanks and Snowbank,” 1933, in the exhibition “Arthur Dove: Yes, I Could Paint a Cyclone.” via Schoelkopf Gallery

Contemporary painters who locate themselves “between abstraction and figuration” — and there are many — can look to the historical example of the early American modernist Arthur Dove. The subject of the inaugural exhibition at Schoelkopf’s new TriBeCa space, Dove (1880-1946) made sensitive and

visionary landscapes that gave form (just barely) to natural phenomena like weather and the changes of seasons.

To Dove, nature was essentially abstract and events such as thunderstorms allowed us to see it that way. As he told a writer for The Chicago Examiner in 1912, “Yes, I could paint a cyclone, not in the usual mode of sweeps of grey wind over the earth, trees bending and a furious sky above. I would paint the mighty folds of the wind in comprehensive colors; I would show repetitions and convolutions of the rage of the tempest. I would paint the wind, not a landscape chastised by the cyclone.”

Although there are no extreme weather events in the works on view, spring arrives with a cataclysmic explosion in the vibrant pastel on canvas “March, April,” from 1929. And in “Tanks and Snowbank” (1933), sunlight glinting off two silver industrial tanks on a winter day produces a spiky halo that extends all the way to the edges of the picture.

The show runs up through the mid 1940s, when fully nonobjective painting was the goal for many artists in Dove’s circle. Among these canvases is the last painting he made, a moody and evocative arrangement of angular shapes in red, yellow and green. The title he gave it says a lot about his imaginative and still inspirational elision of categories: “Beyond Abstraction.” *KAREN ROSENBERG*

CHELSEA

David Novros

Through Dec. 2. Paula Cooper Gallery, 534 West 21st Street, Manhattan; 212-255-1105; paulacoopergallery.com.

David Novros's "Asturias 2," 2022, oil on canvas, at Paula Cooper. David Novros/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Photo by Steven Probert, via Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Since the mid-60s, David Novros has been dedicated to art's relation to place, creating site-specific murals, paintings and frescoes that speak in a Minimalism-accented geometric abstraction. (His first, commissioned by the conceptually simpatico Donald Judd in 1968 for a wall of his Spring Street studio, still exists there; neither of them loved the Minimalist label.) In their continuation of those concerns, the new work here is a bridge to an earlier version of New York's art world, one interested more with process than the marketplace.

Novros's inquiries reach even further into history — Spain's Alhambra and Fra Angelico's San Marco; the cave paintings in the Dordogne. The four multipartite paintings here, each composed of 11-20 monochromatic, interlocking canvases, are titled "Asturias," another cave art-rich region, though only "Asturias 1" (2022) evokes a Paleolithic palette of leathery sepia and clay. The rest are brighter, but share a chalky application — blotches of eggplant and dusty ocher appearing as if they've been absorbed into the canvas rather than brushed, like pigment ground into plaster.

Novros works within the guardrails of rectangular painting while also fracturing its limits. His slender panels can read as cuneiform or runic marks, but also interdependent systems: The bright passages and white voids they omit create an optical short-circuit as you move, transferring a residual perception of one group on another, like so many Albers squares exploded across the wall. Each work occupies its own tract of wall, giving them the flavor of an altarpiece, as if they've always been there, recently unearthed. *MAX LAKIN*

Roberta Smith, the co-chief art critic, regularly reviews museum exhibitions, art fairs and gallery shows in New York, North America and abroad. Her special areas of interest include ceramics textiles, folk and outsider art, design and video art. More about Roberta Smith