

**LAST CHANCE**

# Review: A.I.R. Gallery Catches Up on Some Unfinished Business

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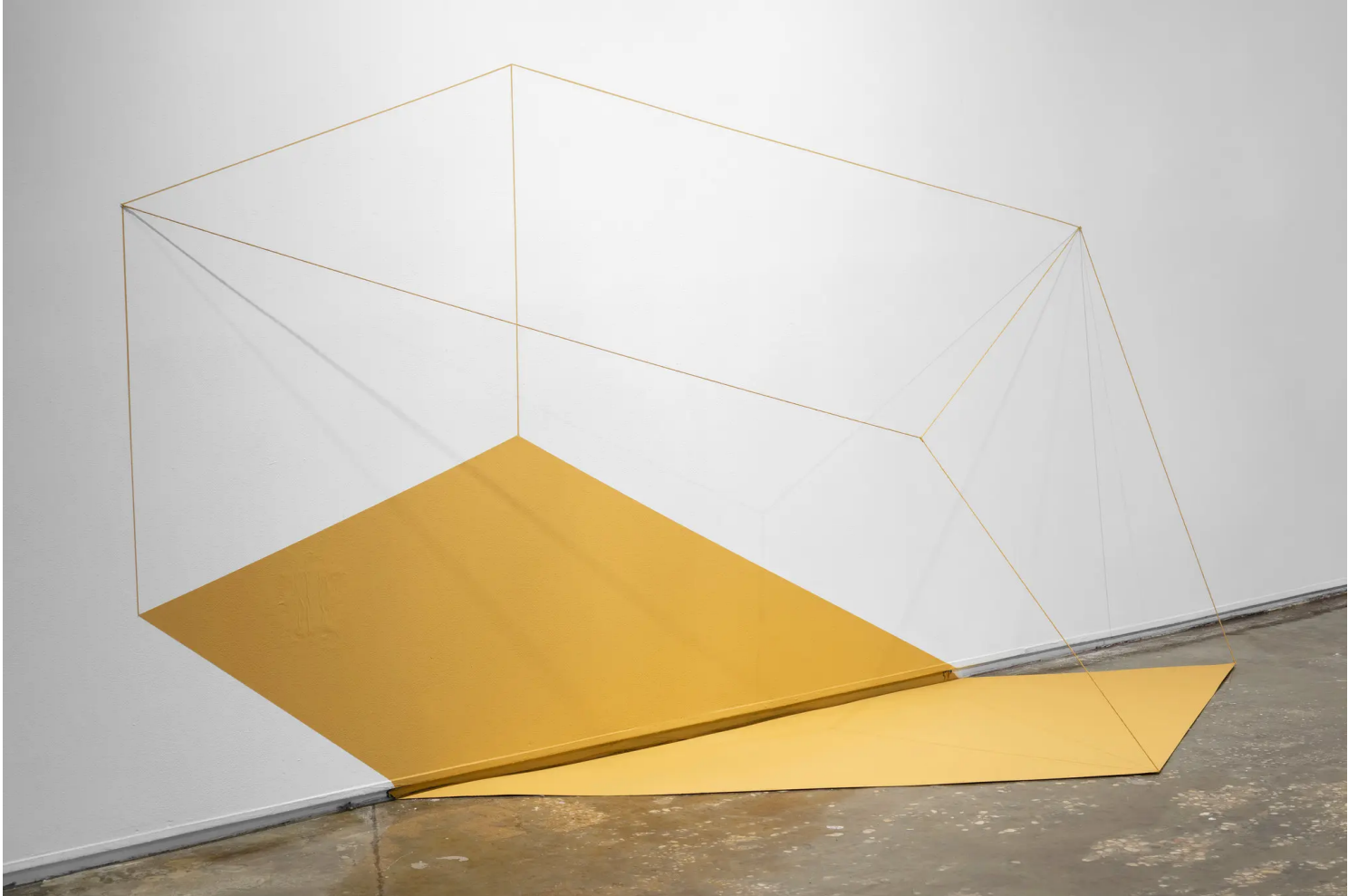
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When it was founded in 1972 in SoHo, A.I.R. Gallery was the first all-women, artist-run cooperative gallery in the country. As with so many second-wave feminist groups, however, its members were almost entirely white.

In 1980, members of the gallery, the artists Ana Mendieta, Kazuko Miyamoto and Zarina organized “Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists in the United States” as an intervention at A.I.R., to showcase the work and concerns of women of color that were being ignored. Now, for the final program of its 45th anniversary celebration, the gallery is revisiting that exhibition with an updated version titled “Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?”

The new show features the same eight core artists from the 1980 exhibition and in some cases the same pieces that were originally displayed. The curators at A.I.R. have also added what they call a “contemporary framing” by a handful of artists and writers,

consisting of an accompanying publication with essays by Aruna D'Souza and Rachael Rakes, a video by Regina José Galindo, and a reading by Che Gossett.



Lydia Okumura's "Diagram of the Cubicle Parallelogram" connect the wall and the floor with geometric forms. Sebastian Bach

As Ms. D'Souza points out in an accompanying publication, "Dialectics of Isolation" was purposefully heterogeneous, a celebration of difference. This gave it a dynamism that carries through into the present, prompting the viewer to seek out connections among the artworks. The racial tensions implied in Janet Henry's "The Studio Visit" (1982), a diorama of a white woman

visiting a black female artist's studio, become more explicit in Howardena Pindell's "Free, White and 21" (1980), a video recounting episodes of discrimination she's faced.

Senga Nengudi's and Lydia Okumura's installations, both originally made in the '80s and recently updated, connect the wall and the floor with geometric forms that evoke bodies moving through space; those invisible presences seem to haunt Beverly Buchanan's miniature shack (undated). Zarina's sculptural use of paper pulp in "Corners" (1980) suggests a care and attention paid to nature that plays out in Selena W. Persico's slide show detailing the states of various shrubs, "Complete View of Region in Every Direction" (1980/2018), which has spiritual overtones that connect it to Judith F. Baca's drawings of female goddesses from 1979 and '81.

Surveying a group that at first looks disparate, a theme emerges: the politics of how humans interact with their environments.

Although the works on view are mostly more than three decades old, the show feels rigorous and relevant. That's both encouraging, as an iteration of how much attention is due to these artists, and somewhat disheartening, as it implies that not much has changed in the intervening years.

The contemporary contributions, especially Ms. D'Souza's essay and Ms. Galindo's video, bring fresh perspectives to bear on the original exhibition. But simply re-presenting and reframing don't feel like enough in our current moment. "Dialectics of Isolation" was a challenge to an institution to examine itself critically. That's something the art world still sorely needs.