BOMB

Many Silenced Histories: Alicia Grullón Interviewed by Louis Bury

A photographic practice examining the relationship between art and politics.

Alicia Grullón, *April 28, 2020, "As Amazon, Walmart, and Others Profit Amid Coronavirus Crisis, Their Essential Workers Plan Unprecedented Strike,"* 2020, 36 × 60 inches, archival color dye sublimation print. Image courtesy of the artist.

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, Alicia Grullón took an ingenious series of self-portraits, *March to June: At Home with Essential Workers* (2020). The photographs depict Grullón attired in the workwear of so-called essential workers, set in rooms throughout her Bronx home. In *April 28, 2020*, for example, she sits poised atop a bicycle in her kitchen, clad in delivery person's gear. *April 14, 2020* portrays her wearing hospital scrubs next to a cat on a beige loveseat. But it's a small recurring detail that renders the costume and set changes especially powerful: the artist's eyes. The protective face masks her characters wear call attention to gazes that are by turns wary, upbeat, disaffected, defiant. These searching looks confront the viewer with the injustice of a society that values BIPOC workers' labor more than their lives.

Similar themes and approaches have long formed a key tendency in Grullón's artwork. In photographs, films, and performances, she has staged or participated in numerous historical reenactments, from Revolutionary War battles (*Battle of Brooklyn* [2018]) to nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic photographs (*Becoming Myth: An Auto-ethnographic Study* [2005]). While these re-created scenarios often contain substantial differences from Grullón's own subject position, the artworks have been designed to emphasize, rather than downplay or elide, those differences. It is a sensitive, self-aware approach that deserves greater prominence in the ongoing critical conversations about the ethics of representing cultures or lives different from your own.

—Louis Bury

Louis Bury
Where does your interest in ethnography come from?

Alicia Grullón

photography was a colonialist tool for categorizing humans, plants, and animals, producing the "proof" that Caucasians were superior. Many of these images were staged to justify the enslavement of African people and the theft of Indigenous land, which allowed the rising middle class to consider themselves more human according to the logic of racial categorization.

LB

How do these considerations manifest in your work?

AG

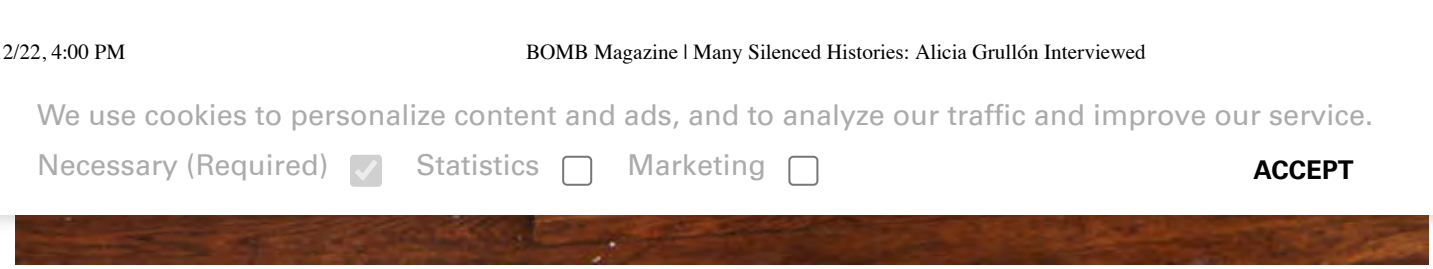
For my photograph series *Becoming Myth: An Auto-ethnographic Study*, I explored aspects of my identity's creation by restaging ethnographic images in my contemporary environment and time. The images made me realize how the history of photography defined my identity in ways beyond my own control. When I was growing up, photographic images reinforced in me an assimilationist, internalized racism. Today, I have a greater sense of agency. I use my work, as well as my historical knowledge, to self-determine how I want to be identified, while honoring the many silenced histories that form my experience.

LB

Can you talk about these concerns with respect to your historical reenactments?

AG

Through reenactments, I crash into unfamiliar circumstances. I say "crash" because the roles are vastly different from my own experiences. Take *Filibuster #1 (Wendy Davis*) (2016) in which I reenact an upper-middle-class white female senator's filibuster to try to stop Texas's abortion ban. Inserting myself into that situation (I embody the situation, not the person) felt like a way to undo colonial thinking and its racist, quotidian metaphors. As a woman of color, talking about reproductive rights conjures histories of forced sterilization, medical experimentation, family separations, job scarcity, and lack of healthcare access.



Alicia Grullón, *April 14, 2020, "NYC Death Toll Jumps by 3,700 after Uncounted Fatalities Are Added,"* 2020, 36 × 60 inches, archival color dye sublimation print. Image courtesy of the artist.

LB

How is *March to June: At Home with Essential Workers* related to other work of yours in this vein?

AG

The pandemic context might seem superficially different, but colonialism's underlying legacy remains. Many essential workers are BIPOC working-class people whose lives are not normally considered essential. As Saidiya Hartman notes in a recent interview for *Artforum*, that labor maintains the economic privileges and psychic lives of whiteness. *March to June* resulted from me asking myself how I can get others to recognize that essential worker's lives are more important than their work. You would think the coronavirus pandemic would be an equalizer, because anybody can die from it, but colonial thinking persists.

LB

What do you understand as the relationship between art and politics?

AG

In both art and politics, communication is central and the audience is the people. When art or politics serves the market, I feel they stop belonging to the people and become part of a power exchange. The guiding force for my own art and activism is history: What is the world I come from, and what is the world I want to imagine and work toward?

LB

What are the similarities or differences between activist organizing and social-practice art?

AG

One difference is that art is funded and organizing isn't. Another is that art has the choice to end. Activism only ends because its campaigns have been won or disrupted. Social-practice art can't take the place of activism and organizing. It can't take the place of social services or educational programs. However, when its

LB

Those are such great points, particularly about the element of choice involved.

AG

Many of the best social-practice projects are successful because they didn't start out as social-practice projects. They began in service to a community impacted by inequity and grew into something else. A good example is Houston's Project Row Houses, still going strong decades after its creation. Debbie Lou Reynolds's Tamms Year Ten, a volunteer coalition that persuaded Illinois legislators to close Tamms supermax prison, is another example of successful grassroots artistic organizing. That's what influences my own projects: how can I be of service to the community.

Alicia Grullón, *October 20, 2020, "Nearly 25% of New York City Transit Workers Cited Covid-19 Infections, Study Says,"* 2020, 36 × 60 inches, archival color dye sublimation print. Image courtesy of the artist.

LB

What's an example of that process in your own work?

AG

A good example is *PERCENT FOR GREEN* (2014–16). The project addresses climate change in the Bronx—where I was raised and still live—as well as other inner-city areas of New York City. Listening to people's experiences helped me map the effects of environmental racism and discriminatory urban policies. Listening allowed me to discuss solutions directly with the people most affected, rather than the top-down approach often used in public policy or urban planning. That's how we came up with the idea for a legislative bill called Percent for Green. It was modeled after New York City's Percent for Art program, in which one percent of construction budgets go to public art in the city. With Percent for Green, another one percent would go to sustainable initiatives overseen by grassroots organizations in the South Bronx.

LB

Who are important influences on you?

AG

That's a tough question because there are so many! Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* is brilliant about literature's white meta-narrative and the inaudible violence it inflicts upon our imaginations. Carrie Mae Weems's and Wendy Red Star's self-portraits have also been very important to me. Both artists take back their bodies from photography's voyeuristic colonial gaze.

LB

How do you remain alert to intersectional complexities in your work?

AG

Context provides the work its necessary history and depth. It's also a reflection of the complexity of being an artist. Or of being a receptionist or lawyer or teacher. I

organizer participating in mutual aid work in support of BIPOC tenants losing their jobs. Making all this coherent is the challenge.

LB

What's an example of how your work addresses that challenge?

AG

The intersectionality has been particularly fecund in my environmental justice projects: *PERCENT FOR GREEN* and also *Surge* (2018). Climate change is directly linked to colonialism. To build their empires, colonial powers grabbed land, extracted resources from it, and exploited its occupants' labor. Today, neoliberal empires engage in similar behaviors under different names: gentrification, real estate speculation, poor urban planning, and redlining. These policies perpetuate climate change. Black and brown working-class communities are on the front lines of climate change in New York City; they experience its effects through pollution, asthma, lack of green space, and food injustice.

Alicia Grullón, *August 12, 2020, "Sex Workers Slammed by the Pandemic Say City Council Aid Misses the Mark,"* 2020, 36 × 60 inches, archival color dye sublimation print. Image courtesy of the artist.

LB

How do you handle feeling overwhelmed?

AG

Two overwhelming feelings led me to create *From March to June*: sorrow and hope. Living close to a hospital, I heard the sound of ambulance sirens twenty-four hours a day during the pandemic's first months. I tried to keep count of how many sirens I heard, but it was too much to tally. Sometimes, I'd be so overcome with sorrow, I'd break down and cry. Then the protests started happening, which, in the middle of all this loss, provided hope. Police brutality isn't something new. But I think people were fed up because George Floyd's murder happened at a time when the federal government demonstrated a blatant disregard for its citizen's lives. The people's uprising in response felt hopeful because it contains the possibility for a necessary new beginning.

Alicia Grullón: Please Don't Let it Be Too Close *is on view at SPACES in Cleveland until March 19.*

Louis Bury is the author of Exercises in Criticism *(Dalkey Archive Press, 2015) and Assistant Professor of English at Hostos Community College, CUNY. He contributes regularly to* Hyperallergic*, and has published art writing in* Brooklyn Rail and Art in America*, as well as creative writing in* Boston Review *and* The Believer.

Alicia Grullón Please Don't Let it Be Too Close SPACES Louis Bury photography performance art and politics

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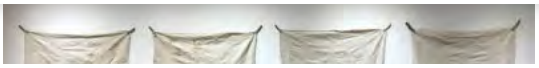

HYPERALLERGIC

Membership

Performance Reviews

What Properly Addressing the Migrant Crisis Might Look Like

Artist Alicia Grullon performs the role of a UN representative for refugees to address the migration crisis at the southern US border.

by Laura Raicovich
September 23, 2019

Alicia Grullon, "Breaking" (still), (2019) single channel video

Instagram is a funny world. On August 31, I scrolled through the usual array of selfies, art snaps, fuzzy kittens, and birthday greetings to see artist **Alicia Grullon** speaking into a mic in front of United-Nations-logoed wallpaper. Given Grullon's activist and community organizing work, it didn't seem out of step for her to be testifying before the **UN Refugee Agency** (UNCHR) but my double take was inspired by the placard in front of her mic which identified her as UNCHR representative Jaklin Caal Maquin.

I put the sound on and heard Grullon declare, in the guise of Maquin, with photo-snapping sounds in the background, that she is "stepping in" for Charlie Yaxley, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, due to the failure of the world to appropriately address the migration crisis at the southern US border. By taking on this persona, Grullon focuses pointedly on the political and economic conditions surrounding decision making at the UN — particularly where and why UN Peacekeeping forces are called into address emergency situations. More importantly, she creates a version of reality that is also a glimpse of a better world.

Having posted this official-looking missive on IGTV, Grullon announces that UN Peacekeeping forces were deployed to the border due to the unending violence, extrajudicial detention of migrants, and child imprisonment enacted by the United States government, which, she points out, is aimed not only at migrants themselves but also at those who try to help them. Maquin, whose name is borrowed to honor the 4-year-old Guatemalan child who died of the flu in a US detention prison, flatly intones:

> 190 member countries have recommended enacting existing Security Council resolutions, as follows, activating the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping operations on the US-Mexico border: Security Council Resolution 1694 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict; security council resolution 1612 on children and armed conflict, and security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security of the UN Charter in accordance to chapter 8.

In siting these existing resolutions and mimicking the official languages of the UN, Grullon-cum-Maquin asserts the obvious fact that the US is in clear violation of all of these resolutions and yet, there is no UN action. Why? Grullon brings back a dead child to address this question, and confronts us with the realities of global power dynamics within the United Nations. The Security Council, which holds outsized authority within these processes, is stacked with nations most responsible for the economic, environmental, and social issues that force migration.

Alicia Grullon, image from a performance from several years ago, "Illegal Death" (2007) traditional C-print, 9" x 13", reenactment of undocumented worker found frozen to death in forest in Long Island

The intensity of the resulting artwork relies on both the performance of UN semiotics, and the poignancy of its details. In the post, Grullon enacts the rituals of invented, yet possible UN action to create a reality she wants to see in the world. She doesn't stop at the possible, however, and imagines another reality entirely, inventing a new resolution, number 83073, which "will transfer leadership of the UN to indigenous and aboriginal people in countries on 5 continents ..."

Through this modest, yet highly accessible public performance, Grullon portrays a potential, transformational world, an alternative to the brutality of current US policy. Influenced by artists working on public access television, Grullon allows Maquin to take over her Instagram account to grant us the imagination to see the future otherwise, and give us hope that in performing this potentiality, we might achieve it in reality.

AUGUST 28, 2019

Bringing Back the Future | Alicia Grullón and Jehan Roberson

Images courtesy of the artist.

I sat down to talk with artist Alicia Grullón unsure of where we might go, but certain we'd address where we have been. Having met through my job and her artist residency at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, I knew Alicia's work to be fiercely powerful and firmly rooted in the histories, voices, discussions, and love for people of color. It is this love, this unwavering dedication to communities of color, to our artistry, our histories, our beauty and our trauma that is the heartbeat of her work. She spans disciplines, geographies, and temporalities.

spare disciplines, geographies, and temporalities. What I appreciate most about her work is that it requires something of you. Through her acts of reckoning and of recuperation, she embodies adrienne maree brown's concept of imaginative power, affirming that "it is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future."(1)

Jehan Roberson: *As I was re-reading your bio, I was thinking about where you say your performance art interrogates the "politics of presence." Your activism, too, lines up with politics of space, which led me to wonder about site-specific work, and the places where art is supposed to be made, celebrated, housed, interrogated...Is that what you meant by "politics of presence?"*

Alicia Grullón: I think that place has so much to do with land, and has so much to do with how we've come to be on this particular land, how land has since been cultivated and developed and geared, that I think to ignore our presence in space is to ignore the history of land. So even down to our identities, our identities are largely affected by whether we have been forcefully displaced from a specific land, or forcefully placed in a specific land. Or both, depending on the person and their background. Coming into a space not invited, but claiming it as your own. And those things are so unresolved that when we talk about these particular politics, it seems as if the conversation is either refused or...these ideas of land percolate, but aren't central as a starting point in even talking about art. Because art, also, has so much to do with presence in a place. And whether that presence in a place is through an artifact that was stolen and placed in there, or a collection of artifacts that became these curiosos in someone's cabinet that led to the founding of a museum, and the land that museum is on. Or, even our

understanding of art is coming from a Western European perspective. So that means most of our knowledge about art is centered on a Western definition of how it's supposed to function, what its purpose is supposed to be, how it's supposed to be made, what media are used, where it's supposed to be shown... I'm just raising questions about how we can rethink this. Because it's not fitting into my lived experience, or the lived experiences of many other artists who are black or indigenous, or of color, or queer. One approach is to be specific about place. For me, when I go into a project, or when I'm invited somewhere, I look into the history of that particular area, that particular place, highlights and not, to inform me in my work and to inform me on what the project will become.

JR: *So there's a lot of research, then. Would you say your practice is largely interrogative, with a constant reflection on what it means to build off of these questions?*

AG: Completely. There's a lot of research, a lot of thinking. It's a lot of reading and a lot of digesting, and a lot of inquiry. I've been asking myself, is it possible to separate our identity from place or where we're from? And how do we get to a more human understanding of people? Which is difficult, because being human has been claimed, particularly, by white men. So that becomes a challenging question because I am human. I know other humans who are not white and male. Or white females. And yet, for us to get down to that essential need to take care of other issues, often based on the illness of being human, I'm just wondering how to interrogate our belonging to a place and not belonging to a place? Because [my art] is so based on that. And then excavating how do other people identify to a location, and it not have been a colonized idea of how one identifies to a location? How do we relate to a location? How does that happen? Through family? Through what we do in a place?

we do in a place?

JR: *It's difficult to even find language to discuss our relationship to land outside of ownership. How do we think of our relationship to land outside of laying claim to it? And how does performance become the vehicle for that interrogation?*

AG: Performance, for me, is so central on my body. With all performance, it is. It's our instrument, our

medium. How are we using this medium? It goes back to this place: How is my presence, my being very aware that I'm a woman of color, how is my presence a vehicle for interrogating belonging to land? I think it becomes very exciting, in a sense, because I go from that semiotic condition of my being—what I look like, my history, where I'm from—and all those things become a way of pushing questions, pushing this interrogation to finally get to a more liberating conversation.

JR: *Which leads me to think about the historical reenactments that you do, your participation in* The Battle of Brooklyn at BRIC*, for example. Would you say more about reenactment and your body as its placed in this situation that initially did not center you?*

AG: For me, it's interesting that we're almost allowed to time travel through performance. In that particular instance, it was the idea of how do I participate in this Revolutionary War reenactment and bring the future to this past? I think that played a huge role in my decision to have the Ferguson protestor's letter in one shoe and having the Red Nation's nine-point manifesto in the other. What happens if I bring these particular events, as best I can, to this particular reenactment? Does it change the way we look at this past history that's taught onto us, and that's reenacted every year? I mean, the reenactors see the power of performing those scenes over and over again. I think the power is in reliving a moment in history that validates the United States' becoming, although the militia

the United States' becoming, although the militia men lost that one particular Battle of Brooklyn. But still, there's a huge enthusiasm in recreating war, and recreating things that aren't touched upon. The recreating of how land was taken, of how slaves were brought to this particular area is not talked about. It's not even mentioned. It's not part of that landscape. It's just this war scene and everything else becomes blurry and cloudy. So, for me, I wanted to play with "what if I brought these two incidents back to the past?"

And then, as a child of immigrants, I have no place to go 'back' to. My parents might be from the Dominican Republic, and that was my culture at home, but it's not like I can go back there. New York City, because of my parents' choice, has become where I'm from. So if this is the place that I'm supposed to be from, how do I fit into this history? How do I physically fit into this history?

JR: *Was having the two texts in your shoes an internal dialogue or grounding? Or was that made public later on?*

AG: It was more of a grounding mechanism for me. No one would know unless I told them. [But] at the exhibition at BRIC, at *Reenactment*, they were there.

JR: *This is really interesting, because the ways in which people of color inhabit spaces has always required a necessary level of stealing away: of scurrying, stealing away yourself or certain talismans, grounding objects, that have always had to be kept under the radar to subvert, in a very* Undercommons *sort of way. So it's also about how we inhabit and are present in space across time. It's an attunement to how history is at play in the present moment, and informing what is to come.*

AG: I think so. I do. And when we look back at the importance of performance…often I tell my students that the history of art as we know it is a Western history. So it's based on who could pay enough to paint. Historically they were kings,

queens, dukes, etc., or the Roman Catholic Church. So, you needed to paint these extraordinary portraits of those in power in order to maintain power. And they were usually housed in churches or at the palace. So, these paintings were made in the context of where they would be housed. If you go further into history, that tradition has largely been maintained. It's become more of a commodity now, changing art's function. But what

if we go to non-Western European forms, why did people create art? Performance is a great way to start talking about that, because a lot of it was based on not just oral history and oral storytelling of a community—and depending on what community in the world you're talking about—but it was usually part of some sort of tradition, some sort of ceremony. The community was involved in it. [These performances] were done usually in very special times, at special moments. It would be worth looking into, because everyone was a part of it, but everything that was done, that was made was for a higher understanding of our purpose here. It's a very different way of using what came to be art. It was more of what made us a community.

JR: What would you say is the role of art in addressing the types of social ills you've mentioned? Under the best of circumstances, when resources are present and available, I suppose we might all imagine what art might be capable of doing. But within social practice, what role does art play within the community settings in which its based?

AG: I don't support the commodification of social practice art and how it's being used, particularly by many foundations and governments, to replace much needed social services and public programming. An artist can't solve these problems. We're not social workers. We're not trained counselors. And in many cases, putting an artist in a situation like that is problematic. Unless an artist has specific training in dealing with PTSD, in

artist has specific training in dealing with PTSD, in dealing with serious depression and anxiety, unless they have that background you should probably not put an artist in that situation. Because, even if they're well intended, they're coming in and then leaving. And the community is still left with, maybe the beginning of some type of help, some type of communication. But because of long-trenched scarring, it's such a quick iodine fix

for something that needs much more investment in order to have human recovery.

JR: *Earlier I wrote intimacy down as an idea that performance can seek to foster. Would you say the kind of performance that you're talking about is necessarily about intimacy?*

AG: Intimacy to do what with ourselves? [I think] it's the intimacy of that time to be silent with ourselves. That time not to be busy thinking about what are we going to do next. Shutting down the chatter in our minds. We're rarely ever in the present moment, just breathing in. I think that's the power of any religious—non Judeo-Christian, non monotheistic—ceremony that we ever partake in, that we're so immersed in that moment. We stop thinking about bills, we stop thinking about everything, and it becomes spiritual. I think that the intimacy that is the point of it.

JR: *To what you were saying about types of performance that require audience or communal engagement, it can often breed a kind of intimacy and a sharing that is antithetical to an increasingly individualist way of approaching the world. I guess I'm just thinking about the necessary communal aspect of existence and how that's always been a condition of our survival. And I'm wondering if you think of performance as working in and outside of those types of intimacies.*

AG: I'm trying to answer in regards to what my intention was, for example, with the Battle of

Brooklyn intervention and bringing back that future. Is it possible to change history by bringing the future back to this moment that's being reenacted, which in itself is a performance? In itself, [the reenactment] is some sort of ritual these re-enactors do every single year. And there's power in that which is why they keep doing it, whether they stop thinking about their lives, because the majority of them are Vietnam War

veterans. So it's like, you're reliving this thing but you're also so immersed in this 'now' that everything else fades away. So there's this pleasure coming out of that.

JR: *I didn't realize the majority of them are veterans. So if they were in fact fighting in the infantry, what must these reenactments do for them in regards to their lived experiences?*

AG: I don't know. How is that used as some sort of coping mechanism? When there are so few social services available to veterans to help them cope with their trauma. So this is one of the many things some of them do that's not killing them.

And I'm thinking of other work, for example Illegal Death, where I was in Van Cortlandt Park and I reenacted the discovery of an undocumented Honduran worker found frozen to death in the woods of Long Island in February 2007. I reenacted that in the woods near my house. I laid in an area where it looked like shelter, in the snow, for a few hours. And then I did it again at the Bronx Museum of the Arts a few years later on their balcony. Again, under the premise of finding shelter on that balcony. And I performed it again at Socrates Park. Each time I think it got gorier, because there was no snow so I couldn't be frozen to death. And I started adding elements, just a trace here of fake blood, so that a story with the viewer could be reflected on. Everyone knew [that] there was a description of what was occurring. That intimacy, really spending time with the crisis, just that time

really spending time with the crisis, just that time devoted to someone we're reliant upon to do our work, but because of the systems that hunt them down, people are in the position of their lives being threatened by the whim of a winter storm. And we don't spend time with it.

I think it's more pertinent now in the 21st century when we're so distracted that we're not able to be intimate with social issues around us. We're not able to be intimate with museums and why they're here. What is their function? Why is this particular person on the board? We're not able to be intimate with this 11-hour filibuster—I reenacted Sen. Wendy Davis' 11-hour filibuster. And I wanted to really spend time with what she was saying, how she was defending a woman's right to healthcare. To spend time with the accounts she was reading. And at the same time I'm spending time with the ways we talk about reproductive health when we're not talking about the forced sterilization that happened to Black and Brown women in this country. It adds even more importance to saving these clinics. Spending time with what Davis was saying, what was happening, the asshole remarks by the senators who were trying to derail her. For me, as the performer, reading through this filibuster and, in a way acting it out, it was an intimate moment for me because I actually got to spend time with the words and with our legal system, not just in that moment.

I'm not that person, nor am I trying to be that person. There are elements of the moment that I might take for us to spend time with reliving them, like being in the Texas senate house. But I'm not Wendy Davis. I'm not a white woman. And I think the reenactment is a [revisiting] of that period in time but changing elements in order for us to see important layers that are pertinent.

JR: *And how the same thing said by a different person—*

AG: —might trigger something else. It might trigger a different understanding of abortion, of the need

a different understanding of abortion, of the need for women's health clinics.

JR: *Do you identify as a social practice artist?*

AG: I'm interdisciplinary, I say as I grin and laugh. There are aspects of social practice I use. And they've always been very specific to climate change and environmental concerns in an urban setting.

JR: *I had an earlier question in mind about the dichotomy often made between art and activism, but do you see those as being two separate fields or as being necessarily separated? Or are both positionalities tied up with how you understand yourself as an artist?*

AG: I think it's just what's needed at this time. We might not always need to use activism as a medium. Right now, there are people, collectives using activism—there's Chinatown Art Brigade—and I guess The People's Cultural Plan, as an art form. We didn't intend that [with The People's Cultural Plan] but it can be seen as art. Right now, in this moment, we need to use art to change the space or the place where art is appearing.

JR: *And would you say to understand the artist as a politically positioned figure?*

AG: Of course. And we've always been taught to keep art and activism separate. We see it right now with many artists not talking about certain situations that are happening, not just at The Whitney, but at El Museo del Barrio. And it goes back to this training where politics are separate, and your funding will rely on [that separation].

JR: *So when you're talking about presence as it relates to making art, how would you define it?*

AG: A couple of things are coming to mind because sometimes the artist is not present in their work. But, for me, it is having your politics present and

open. Consistently, it also has to do with representation and, still, the lack of representation of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Muslim, queer people. Their presence in art institutions...and it's not to say that just having them is enough. It's doing the work of requiring them to be intimate with all of these issues having to do with why we're here, how we got here, and who is being hurt in the making of this art or in the making of this institution. Why are we being asked to artwash crimes against humanity? I think that's how I see presence in art.

NOTES

1. adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017, 34.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alicia Grullón moves between performance, video, and photography. She channels her interdisciplinary approach towards critiques of the politics of presence--an argument for the inclusion of disenfranchised communities in political and social spheres. Grullón's works have been shown in numerous group exhibitions including Franklin Furnace Archives, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, BRIC Arts | Media House, School of Visual Arts, El Museo del Barrio, Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery, and Performa 11. She has received grants from several institutions including the Puffin Foundation, Bronx Council on the Arts, and the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York. Review's and essays regarding Alicia's work can be found in the *New York Times, Village*

Voice, *Hyperallergic*, *Creative Time Reports*, *Art Fag City*, and *ArtNet News*. Grullón has participated in residencies in the United States, South Korea, and Germany, and has presented workshops as part of the 2017 Whitney Biennial with Occupy Museums, Creative Time Summit '15, and The Royal College of Art, among others. She holds a BFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts, and an MFA from the State University of New York at New Paltz, and has completed advanced graduate level coursework in art and philosophy of education at the Teacher's College at Columbia University.

Jehan Roberson is a writer, educator, and artist whose work explores text as a site of liberation, place making, and historical intervention for Black peoples in the Americas. She currently serves as the Collections Specialist for the Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library where she works with artists, activists, and scholars to historically and digitally preserve their works. Her writing appears in *Apogee*, *Public Books*, *MadameNoire*, *VICE*, *emisférica*, and *Kalyani Magazine,* among others. Jehan is an editor of *Teachers & Writers Magazine* and *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory.* She is a 2017 and 2018 Public Performance Art fellow with Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative.

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Storage, a New Artist-Run Space in New York, Wants to Offer an Alternative to Exploitative Gallery Models

Onyedika Chuke looks to highlight the work of women artists and artists of color at his new space.

Sarah Cascone (https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25), October 15, 2020

Onyedika Chuke, artist and founder of Storage, a new gallery on the Bowery. Photo by Sam Chun.

When artist Onyedika Chuke (http://onyedikachuke.com/) emerged from months of lockdown in New York City, there was one thing he felt he needed to do—and it wasn't to see friends or to eat outdoors. It was to start a gallery.

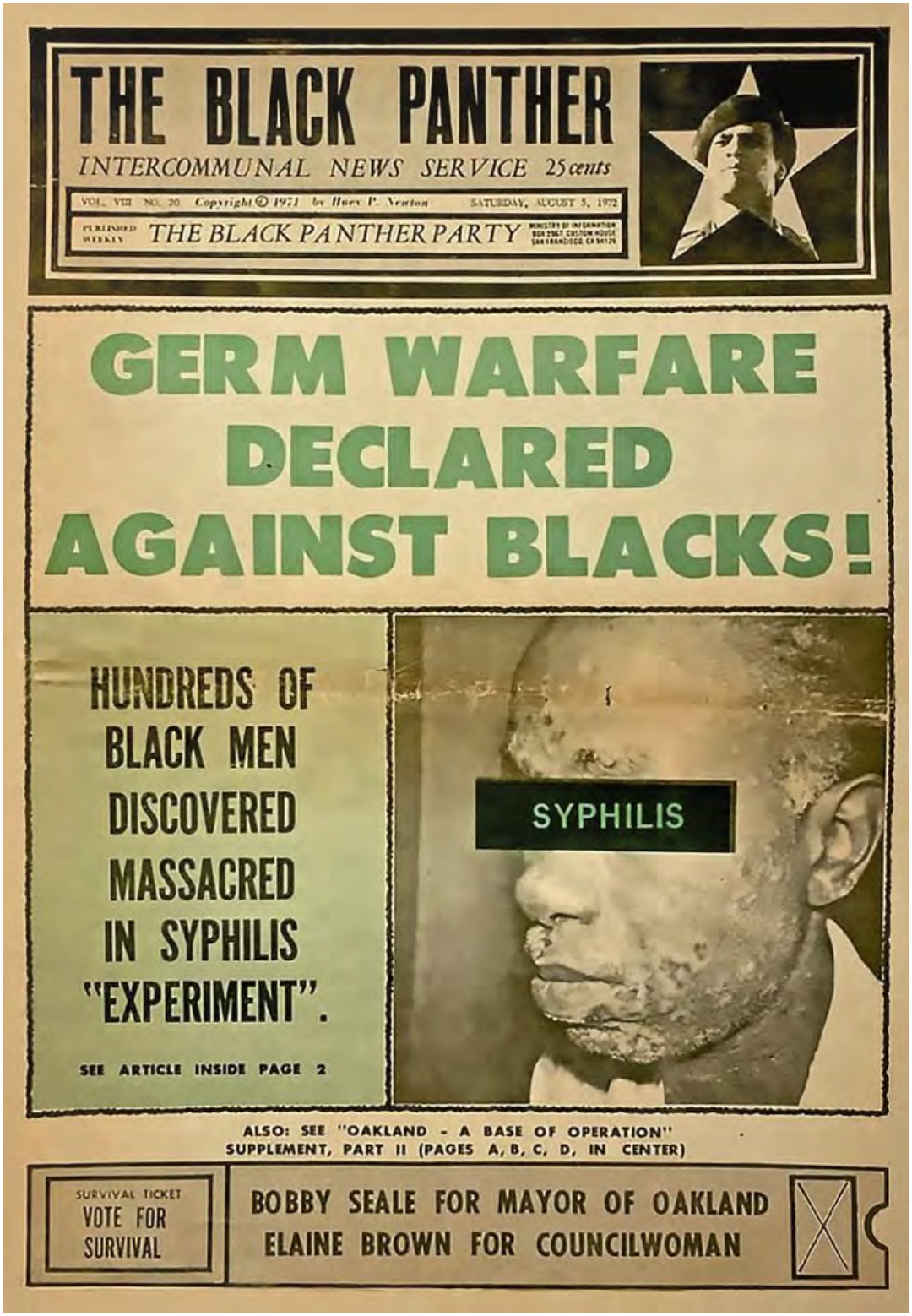
He opened his space, called Storage, last month inside the basement art studio he'd been renting underneath a Korean restaurant on the Bowery. "It was a really run-down dusty space that I knew something magical could happen in," Chuke told Artnet News.

The gallery—which opens at a moment when many other art businesses are facing financial challenges of historic proportions (https://news.artnet.com/market/new-survey-financial-fallout-galleries-1864281)—aims to serve as an extension of Chuke's artistic practice and activism. From the front end, it looks like a traditional commercial gallery, with a focus on work by women and people of color. But Chuke says he has embedded within it policies and practices that he hopes can model a more just art ecosystem.

Storage, he said, is "a gallery in form of a protest."

The inaugural exhibition is an intergenerational group show featuring young artists such as Austin Martin White, Jazmine Hayes, Rena Anakwe, Sam Chun, Yanira Collado, and Daniella Portillo, as well as more established figures including William Cordova (http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-cordova/), Rick Lowe

(http://www.artnet.com/artists/rick-lowe/), and Emory Douglas (http://www.artnet.com/artists/emory-douglas/), the minister of culture for the Black Panthers (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/emory-douglas-interview-1889924). (The gallery will be holding virtual conversations with the artists to discuss connections between their work.)



Emory Douglas, *Germ Warfare Declared Against Blacks* (1972). Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

While Storage will take the standard 50 percent commission on art sales, Chuke is putting a portion of the proceeds toward the gallery's new mentorship program for young artists, ages 16 to 24. (The program will also be funded by prints and editions produced in the gallery's in-house print studio.) "It's more of a social enterprise then it is a full-on commercial outfit," Chuke said. To help him meet the overhead, he is keeping his jobs as an educator at Cooper Union and director of outreach at Foster Pride.

Artists and writers also receive a special discount, though, Chuke said, most artists ended up waiving it. Works in the inaugural show range in price from $750 to $50,000, and have nearly sold out, according to Chuke.

Chuke, who was the inaugural New York City public artist in residence at Rikers Island in 2018, hopes to fill a gap in the industry that he's experienced as an artist himself. In 2011, disillusioned by dealers who he felt didn't understand his practice, Chuke placed a ten-year moratorium on sales of his own work.

"I became a gallerist because I thought I needed to be," he said. "I want to be that thing that I haven't been able to find." And with ten years of working at art galleries under his belt—Chuke is a veteran of New York's Susan Sheehan Gallery (https://www.susansheehangallery.com/)—he feels fully prepared to run the business side of things.

In order to ensure the art is going into the right hands, and won't be flipped for profit (https://news.artnet.com/market/say-loud-show-christies-1901685), he relies on a network of elder art dealers. "It *is* possible to have a healthier environment of patronage," Chuke said. "Saying no to veterans and newer collectors with harmful habits is a part of that process."

William Cordova, *Tetragrammaton*. Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

The concept of the gallery was born after Chuke visited Nigeria for the funeral of his grandfather and returned home to a soon-to-be-locked-down New York, struck by feelings of loneliness. “Then you started seeing images of people being killed by the police... All this stuff was compounding: this isolation, all this death, and COVID was really hitting Black people more than most people,” he said.

He had the realization that “I can either be depressed or I can be active.” At first, that meant participating in Black Lives Matter protests, but when the movement began to quiet down, “I realized I had to keep it going.”

He chose the name Storage in the hopes that it would give an artistic community space to reexamine, recontextualize, and respond to history. “It’s the place where you unpack, you pull things apart, you reorganize,” he said.

Austin Martin White, *Untitled (Iron bit mask)*. Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

In curating the inaugural show, Chuke was inspired by a quote from "Discourse on Colonialism" a 1950 essay by Afro-Caribbean poet and politician Aimé Césaire: "It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism."

"That quote cemented everything for me. There's a lot of talk about a rebuilding the world, almost fanned by the flames of COVID," Chuke said. "The way I've cleansed myself and revived myself in the past was to make art. Then I thought, what would other makers do if we had a space to do that?"

See more works from the show below.

Leslie Hewitt, *Riffs on Real Time With Ground-(Green Mesh)* 2017. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli, courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Rick Lowe, *Untitled* (2018). Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

Jazmine Hayes, *A Round of Applause*, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Storage.

Alicia Grullon, *Female as Nymph #2 C* (2005). Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

Alicia Grullon, *Eyes Watching* (2005). Photo by Storage, courtesy of the artist.

"storage_" is on view at Storage, 96 Bowery, Basement, New York, September 10–October 25, 2020.

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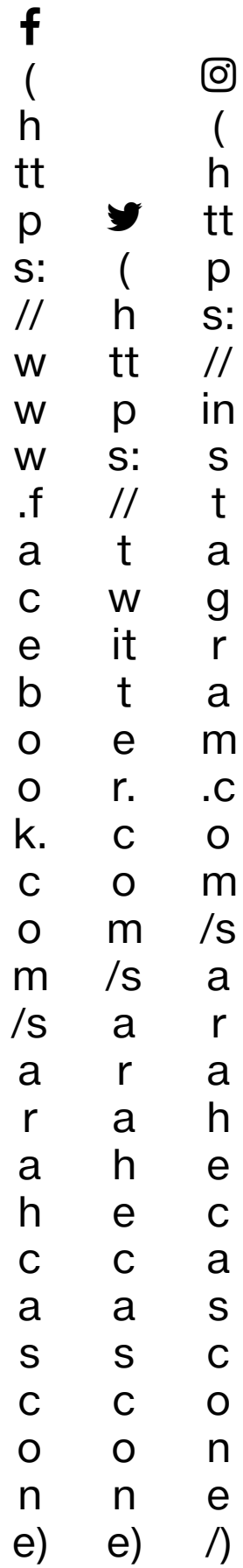
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People (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/people)

Legendary Black Panther Artist Emory Douglas on How Digital Media Can Be Harnessed to Make Protest Art Far More Effective Than Ever

We spoke to the artist about art, protest, and why his work is gaining belated canonization.

Melissa Smith (https://news.artnet.com/about/melissa-smith-1090), June 30, 2020

Artist Emory Douglas, of former Black Panther Party. (Photo by MediaNews Group/Bay Area News via Getty Images)

Emory Douglas is an activist, and always will be. But the 77-year-old artist thinks that the young people protesting across the United States should be allowed to create their own legacy independent of the one established by the Black Panther Party, an organization he was a part of for almost 15 years.

Douglas served as the revolutionary artist and minister of culture for the Panthers, and was in charge of creating images (largely disseminated through its official newspaper) that established a visual record of the party's platform. Lately, journalists have been reaching out to ask him to comment on today's protests against police brutality. Knowing how easy it is for movements to get coopted, he's agreed to talk to some, but after that is "staying out of it," he says, preferring to allow the protestors to speak for themselves.

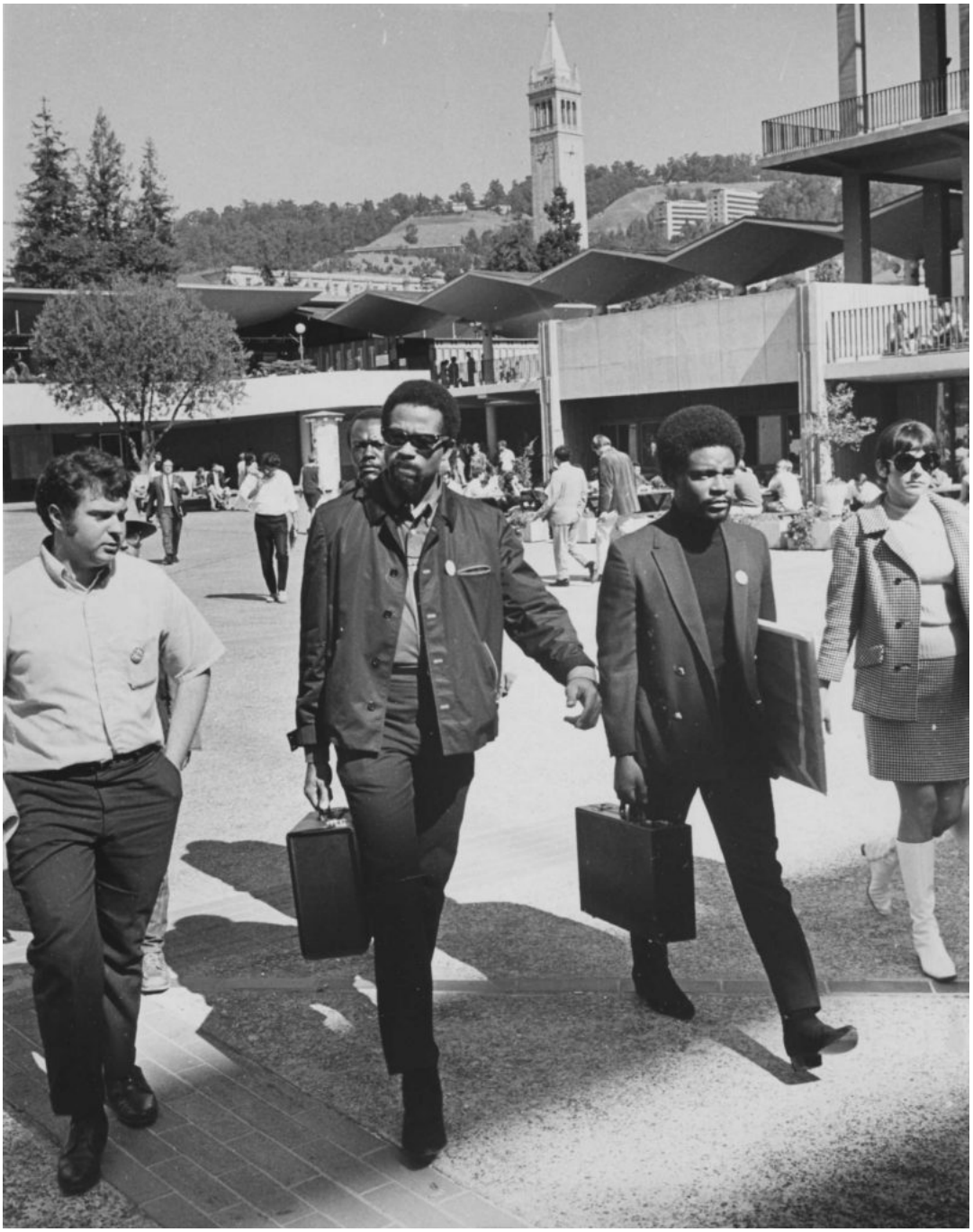
Douglas has managed his career as an exhibiting artist with similar discernment, examining each opportunity that comes his way for its social-justice bonafides. The artist and dealer Suzanne Jackson (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/suzanne-jackson-interview-1709232), founder of the influential Gallery 32, was one of the few people who exhibited his work while the Black Panther Party was still active.

It wasn't until the mid-aughts, he says, that others within the art community began to meaningfully engage with his depictions of police as pigs and of Black mothers tending to their first and second shifts. Decades after he started making art, he was finally gaining broader recognition for the way in which he used images as a tool to stimulate political and social change and for the extent to which the party proved how effectively images can shape public opinion.

In 2006, the artist Sam Durant edited a monograph about Douglas's influential work, setting in motion a major solo museum show, his first, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles ("Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas"), which triggered an inexhaustible churn of interest in the years since.

Douglas has traveled throughout the country and around the world, to museums and politically-engaged organizations and events, using his art to illustrate what's at the heart of the Panthers' ethos and practice. He did this not to have them "duplicate what had been done," Douglas says, "but to be inspired in the context of what *they* are doing."

We spoke to Douglas about art, protest, and how museums have changed over the course of his career.



(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/GettyImages-1006146500.jpg)

Lawrence Magid, Eldridge Cleaver, and Emory Douglas, Black Panther Party artist in 1968 at UC Berkeley. Digital First Media Group/Oakland Tribune via Getty Images.

The Black Panther organization doesn't exist anymore. Did it leave behind a blueprint for protestors today?

For those who are aware and conscious, for some of the historical things, they've been inspired by [that]. But I think it's the direct confrontation and contact with the system on a daily basis. That has changed to the point where Brother Floyd's murder was the spark.

And with COVID-19 at same time, people are beginning to stress over many things. They are seeing how the system really is not what they [thought]. What they were told to believe in is a lie.

There as an article in the *New York Times* recently on Black politics (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/13/opinion/sunday/black-politicians-george-floyd-protests.html); about how elected officials today, even African American ones, are not proposing social policies that affect real change. Instead, young leaders and organizers on the ground are. Was it surprising to see that there's a lack of real leadership among our elected leaders, even African American ones?

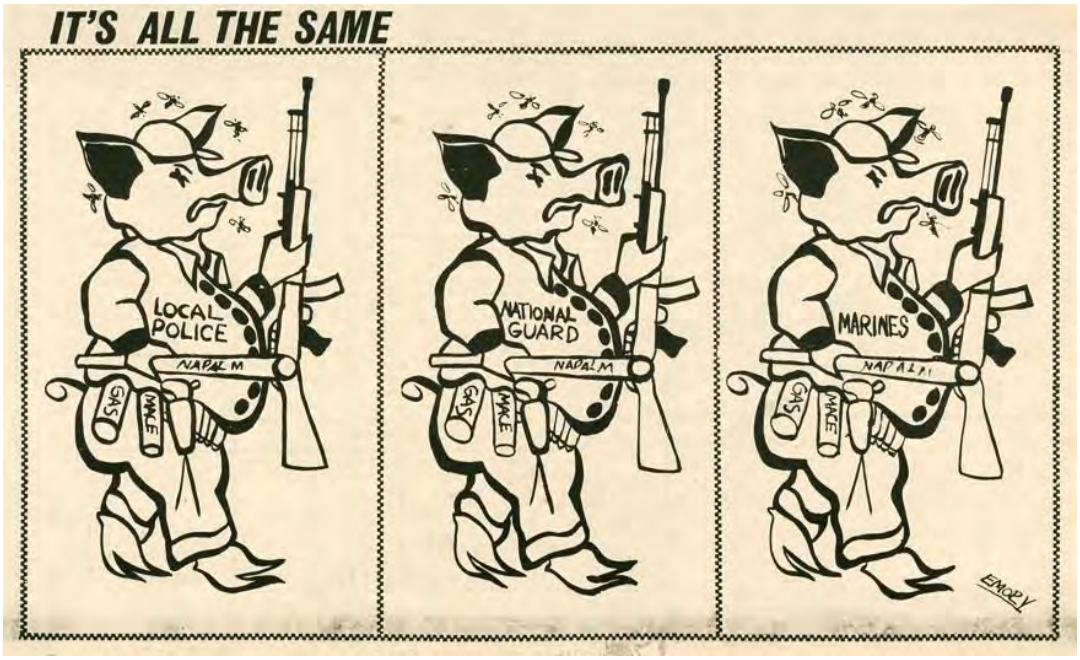
Not really. That's always been the game. They are locked into those institutions. They have to go along with the program. In many ways, they might say things to calm it down or may mean well in what they wanted to do. But they're so integrated into the corruptness of the system that it doesn't allow for them to do anything on a broad scale that can be beneficial to the constituency across the board.

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/install.png)

Installation view of "Emory Douglas: Black Panther" at the New Museum.

I know how crucial it was for you back then to create a visual language for the cause—both in exposing the oppression of African Americans as well as changing the way African Americans depict themselves. What do you think of the role that images play in today's protests? And how do you think the broad use of social media changes or expands on that?

You guys can reach people almost instantaneously, in real time, because of digital media today. So those dynamics are very powerful. Back in the day, you can have an organization with chapters and branches, like we did across the country. And I was always being interviewed by mainstream publications—otherwise you weren't able to the message out. The mainstream media needed something to cover, so the civil rights movement and the human rights movements that were taking place were always up front in the news at any given time. In that context, people became highly aware of what was going on. But in today's world, you can do it 24 hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year. And that's why you see worldwide solidarity beginning to exist.



(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/05543044f6fcff947e939464170625fa.jpg)

Emory Douglas's illustration of police officers as pigs for the Black Panther Party. Courtesy Flickr creative commons.

Did you ever think that your depiction of police as pigs would take off as much as it has and become so much a part of our consciousness?

There had always been a psychological response that did transcend the Black Panther Party in the African American community and it became a national and international symbol.

Of course, there had always been political circles where people identified with it [more], but today you got [digital] media now, and people can [easily] pick it up and flash it online. Over the years, when I was working here in San Francisco with the Black press, there was always this awareness and consciousness about that work. It has always been a part of the people's cultural identity in relationship to how they thought about injustice. The pigs became a psychological symbol of resistance.

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2018/12/emory-douglas.jpg)

Emory Douglas, *We Shall Survive Without a Doubt* (1971). Courtesy of Black Lives Matter.

When did your work start getting recognition from the art community, and from art institutions? When is the first time someone reached out to you about exhibiting your work?

Gallery 32 in Los Angeles [was the first]. As far as overall interest of galleries, that has come about later on. That came along with more awareness of what was going on in the real world. When Black lives matter to others. And even before that, when you had more liberal and progressive folks who began to work in the museum, and they began to look at and frame it as part of American history.

And I began to communicate and more talk more [around the time] my art book came out.

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/66372_ca_object_representations_media_7013_publiclarge.jpg)

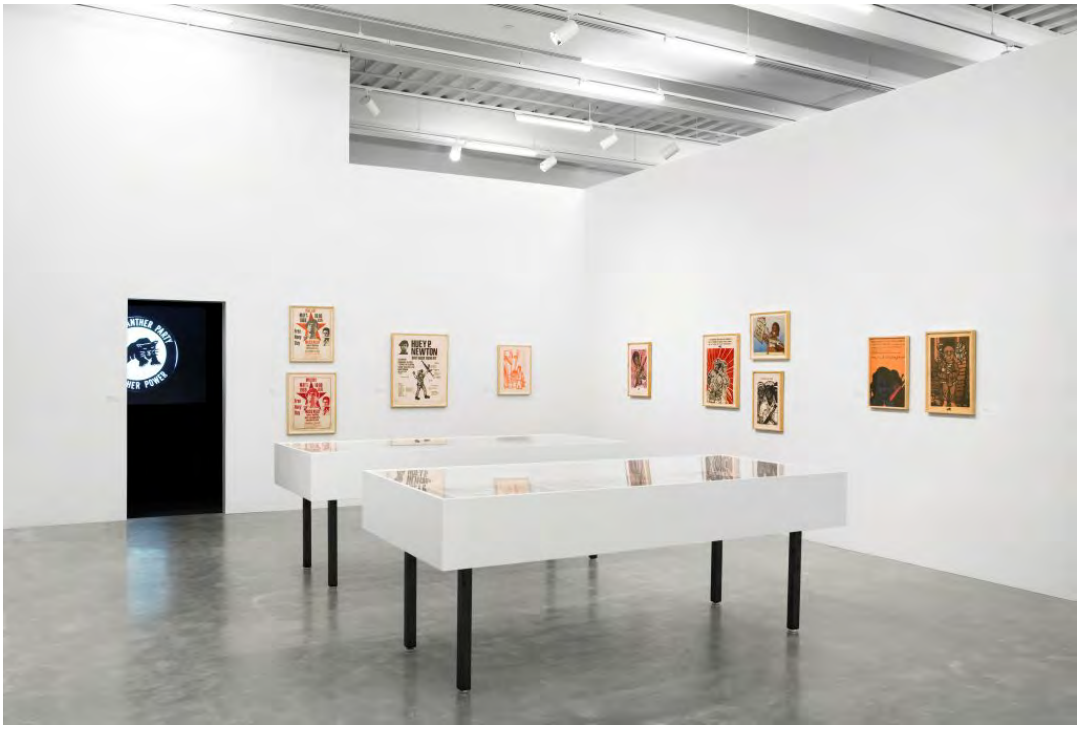
Installation view of “Emory Douglas: Black Panther” at the New Museum.

The book you worked on with Sam Durant in 2006?

Yes. I began to travel to colleges and universities, doing collaborations all over the place. That became the way that many museums got interested in the work.

Plus, you began to have a lot of scholars of color who began to write about the work. All the different films that you begin to see, or documentaries around the Black Panther Party—and the artwork would always be highlighted. It was being talked about and discussed—the visual importance of what was happening during that time. So you have all those dynamics that play into how the images became acceptable in the context of the museum world.

When I did the [show] at MOCA in Los Angeles, it was Sam Durant who had an installation there at that time. [The museum] gave him the option of doing whatever he wanted to do—presentations and talks. And that’s why he tried to contact me—because he said he was inspired by the work. And when I did a talk, it was packed. But you had people who normally don’t come to museums—a lot of social justice and community people. And they saw that as a possibility for a new audience coming to museums. So when [Sam Durant] approached them about having an exhibition, they jumped on it.



(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/IMG_9125F-copy.jpg)

Installation view of “Emory Douglas: Black Panther” at the New Museum.

They were just underestimating the interest, which isn’t surprising.

Yes. And then I went to New York to the Studio Museum in Harlem and the [New Museum], they were collaborating together. And the same thing there, sold out.

Once I went to Argentina, a [design collective] called Trimarchi [invited me to their art event]. They held it in a huge stadium, like an NBA-sized stadium.

So you had all these young artists, about 5,000 or 6,000 of them. Some of them in the corridor of the outside [with] their art installations, selling artwork.

They said to me that right now, they’re coming to the point where they’re trying to be more conscious of including political artwork into the discussion, so that’s why they invited me. After the presentation, I got such a [good reception], I thought, what was it they found so stimulating? And it occurred to me that they could see in the art the resistance and self-determination and they could apply it to some of the things they were dealing with in their lives, in their countries. So the art became a link of solidarity, transcending borders—continuing on with these young people.

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/GettyImages-1248294114.jpg)

The steel fence at Lafayette Park has become a makeshift memorial at 16th street after "Defund The Police" was painted on the street near the White House on June 08, 2020 in Washington, DC. After days of protests in DC over the death of George Floyd, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser has renamed that section of 16th street "Black Lives Matter Plaza." Photo by Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images.

Do you think it's interesting that as more of these clashes are happening, museums are collecting protest images in real time (https://news.artnet.com/art-world/collecting-2020-black-lives-matter-protests-1878480)?

Yes, like at the Smithsonian (https://news.artnet.com/the-art-angle/art-angle-podcast-smithsonian-aaron-bryant-1887797). Again and again, it's young folks in there who can do it now, who couldn't do it before. That's one of the keys. Because there was a time when you would have exhibits—not necessarily radical exhibits—that they would claim were immoral. They were trying to close them down. Now you've got [people] coming there, students who graduate from universities who were a part of the movement in some kind of way, or in solidarity [with the movement], or thought of it as free consciousness or free speech. Then they have their kids who they talk about their history to. And then that transmits to what you see today in opening up the museums in many ways.

Do you feel like that interest is going to continue? Especially on the institutional side?

Well, you have so many demands now. And Black and brown artists who are talking about it. And white artists who are opting out of working in museums—and particularly doing stuff in museums where they got all these colonial powers on these boards. All those things are being exposed. That is shifting stuff.

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/GettyImages-1218218792.jpg)

A protester speaks to a crowd from the pedestal that once hosted the statue of Edward Colston. Photo by Giulia Spadafora/NurPhoto via Getty Images.

People are speculating that today's protest movement is going to change how institutions operate generally with respect to social justice. Do you feel as though this is going to precipitate real change?

It's a worldwide thing now. They could shove it off before and call it insignificant. But you can't do that anymore because this is a worldwide protest against bigotry and racism.

So you're optimistic?

You can be optimistic and, at the same time, the question becomes: has it been ingrained enough to make it happen as it should at this point in time? Or will it be a drawn-out, incremental process?

(https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2020/06/install2.png)

Installation view of “Emory Douglas: Black Panther” at the New Museum.

Well, I certainly hope you still get the proper attention on your work.

It’s more so the fact that 50 years later, the artwork still has relevancy to it. Because we still have some of the same things happening now as happening then. You have young people who see that. When I do a talk, they’ll say, “Well, you could just tweak this and tweak that, and it could be 50 years later.”

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Melissa Smith

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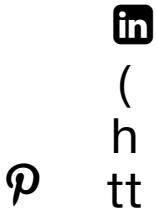
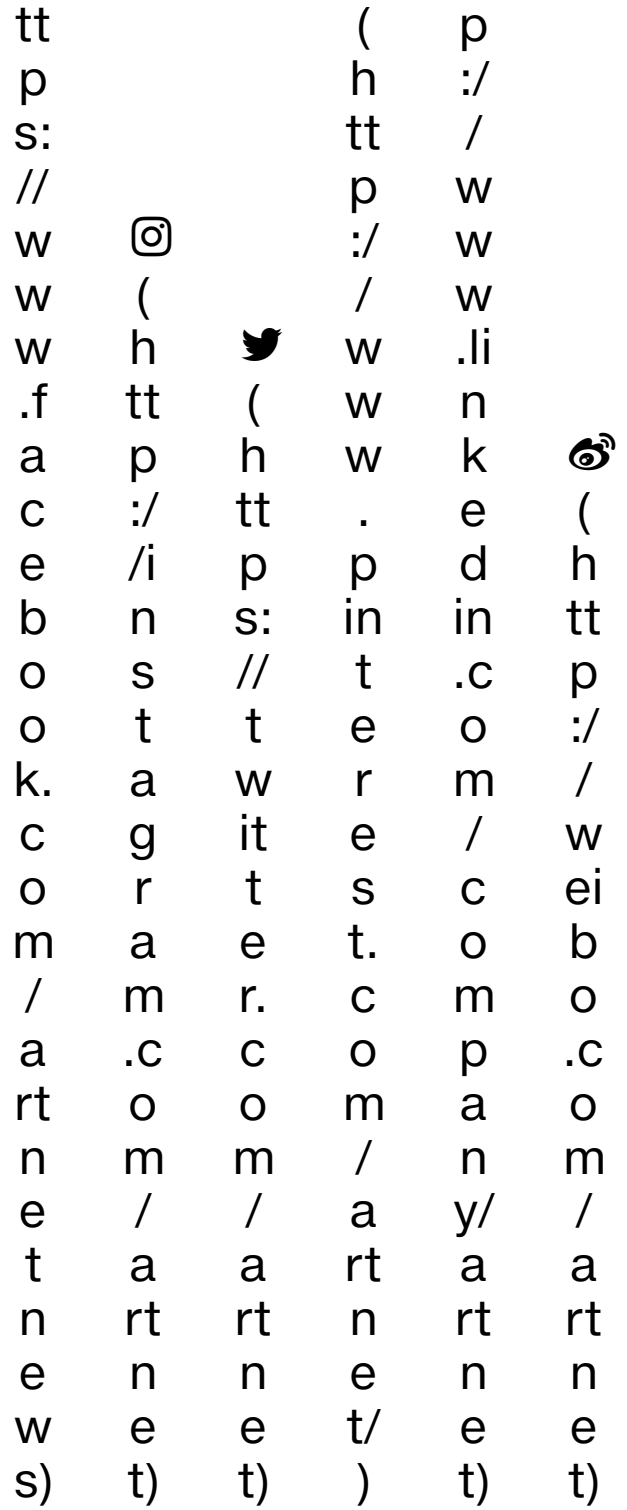




The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/15/arts/design/art-galleries-tribeca-lower-manhattan.html

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Ablaze With Art: Thriving Galleries in Lower Manhattan

Will Heinrich heads to TriBeCa, where new galleries keep popping up and strong shows abound.

By Will Heinrich
Oct. 15, 2020

Walking around TriBeCa galleries recently felt strangely, blessedly, heartbreakingly close to normal. Some bars and restaurants — like the upscale diner in Cortlandt Alley — remained closed, but Lower Manhattan is ablaze with art. Just across the street from that empty diner, at Andrew Kreps Gallery, I visited Kim Dingle's overhead views of restaurant tables, which she made in the 2000s while operating a restaurant in Los Angeles, and over at Canada I thrilled to Joan Snyder's delicate but explosively colorful abstractions. (Note that both shows close Oct. 17.)

Luhring Augustine has opened a branch on White Street with a killer show of watercolors and found object sculptures by the Brazilian artist Lucia Nogueira (through Oct. 31), and a new project called Broadway has opened with a show by the Indigenous video artist and photographer Sky Hopinka. Ortuzar Projects is hosting a retrospective of Lynda Benglis's sculptural works (through Dec. 3) in concert with uptown's Cheim & Read gallery.

Vikky Alexander has incisive photo collages and eerie glass sculptures at Downs & Ross (through Oct. 25); Peter Freeman's rotating group show (through Dec. 19) of 20th-century masters from Agnes Martin to Walker Evans is particularly strong; and you'll want to catch Steve Mumford's captivating graphic journalism at Postmasters (through Oct. 31). Below are six more exhibitions in or near TriBeCa — from Varick Street to the Bowery, more or less — that have stayed with me.

Dalton Paula

Through Oct. 24. Alexander and Bonin, 47 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-367-7474, alexanderandbonin.com.

"Ambrósio," by Dalton Paula, oil and gold leaf on canvas in two parts. The artist took photographs of Black Brazilians and then used those images as the basis for his portraits of historical figures. Dalton Paula; Alexander and Bonin

There are no surviving images of the 24 Afro-Brazilian figures — some historical, some legendary — who populate the paintings in Dalton Paula's "A Kidnapper of Souls," his North American solo debut. (Mr. Paula, a Brazilian painter and multimedia artist who makes work about the African diaspora, did appear in the 2018 New Museum Triennial.) He modeled them, instead, after residents of a settlement originally founded by escaped slaves in the Brazilian state of Goiás.

Each figure, sensitively rendered in oil and gold leaf against a green or turquoise background — a style inspired by turn-of-the-century portrait photography — straddles a subtle lacuna: The 2-foot-by-18-inch panels they are painted on are made by screwing two narrow canvases together, and you can just make out the seam. It's an understated gesture that carries a lot of weight, bringing to mind not just the syncretic origins of Afro-Brazilian culture, or the continued fusion of those origins with contemporary Brazilian life, but also the enduring marks left by cleaving people away from their homes and families.

Kayode Ojo

Through Oct. 25. Martos Gallery, 41 Elizabeth Street, Manhattan; 212-560-0670, martosgallery.com.

A phoropter, an ophthalmic testing device, hangs at eye level near the entrance of Kayode Ojo's show at Martos Gallery. The 2020 work is titled "5'11."" Kayode Ojo and Martos Gallery

The conceptual artist Kayode Ojo continues to arrange found objects with a masterly touch in "The Aviator," a sophomore show at Martos named after Martin Scorsese's 2004 biopic of Howard Hughes. A phoropter, the device optometrists use to determine a patient's prescription, hangs at eye level near the gallery entrance, at once a metaphor for art and art itself. (Let the artist shape your vision if you dare!) Or is it a comment about structural biases?

Things only get more slippery as Mr. Ojo goes on to arrange prop handcuffs, chrome-plated music stands, replica pistols, open Swiss Army knives, and other tools with reflective surfaces in minimal but well-ordered piles. Because the placement of all these objects appear to be as significant as the items themselves, they all become terms in a single, all-encompassing visual language, supple and thought-provoking but endlessly ambiguous.

'Storage_'

Through Oct. 25. Storage, 96 Bowery, Manhattan; 646-504-5810, storage-projects.com.

William Cordova's "Tetragrammaton (tusuq, laykas, CCB, MCSD)," 2020, ink, graphite, oil, paper collage, glue on paper. William Cordova and Storage

The inaugural group show at this new project space, founded by the artist Onyedika Chuke in his own basement art studio, is a powerful mix of explicit politics and formal verve. Three of Emory Douglas's graphic cover designs for the Black Panther newspaper remain as arresting as they were when he composed them 50 years ago. The Miami-based artist Yanira Collado contributes a spare, evocative sculpture reminiscent of a rooftop antenna, and a series of black-and-white photographs that document performances by Alicia Grullón are surprisingly striking in their own right. Two monumental works on paper — one, by William Cordova, a polymath of patterns, features a grayscale check pattern, and the other, by the Houston artist Rick Lowe, has a tidal wave of black marker lines on a golden yellow ground — are tacked directly to the walls, adding an extra burst of studio-visit excitement to an already energetic roundup.

Mary Carlson

Through Oct. 31. Kerry Schuss, 73 Leonard Street, Manhattan; kerryschussgallery.com.

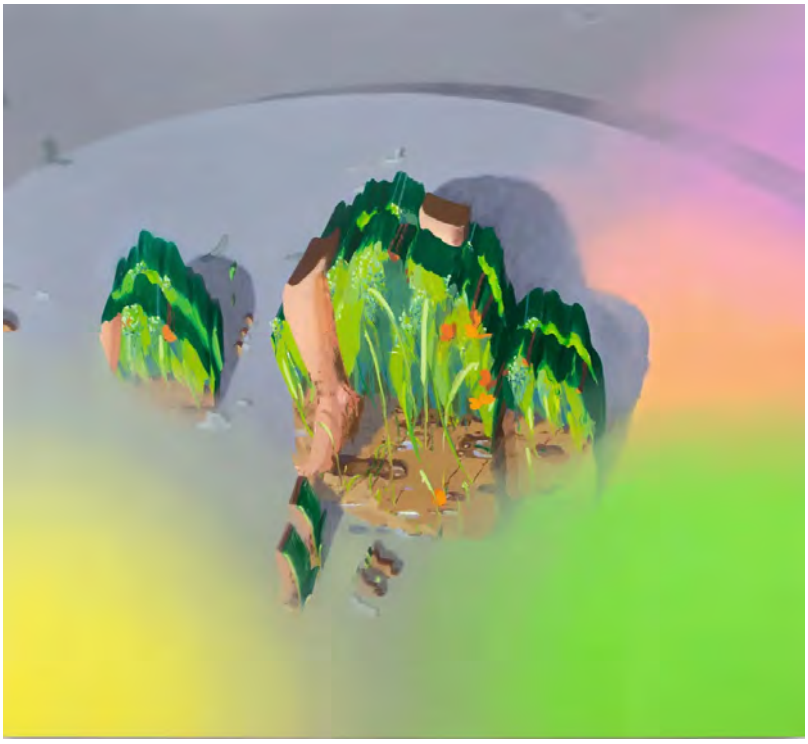
Mary Carlson's "Eden Trees (after Bruegel)," 2020, glazed porcelain. Mary Carlson and Kerry Schuss

A miniature is a refuge from the trials of real life, an otherworldly little kingdom you can enter with your eyes. But the palm-size landscapes in the ceramist Mary Carlson's "Eden," most of them sourced from the peripheries of old master paintings, are different. "Eden Trees (after Bruegel)," a thick brown puddle of desert under a cluster of lumpy trees, is precisely rendered and shiny with glaze; "Eden

(after Cranach)" features a trim little cave perfect for some tiny hermit; and in "Reservoir Blue Hills," the only piece from life, the land is even more luscious blue than the water. Weaving around the low white pedestals that these nine little patches of paradise reside on, you may suspect that the Kingdom of Heaven, while surely at hand, is in need of some protection.

Dana Lok

Through Nov. 1. Page, 368 Broadway, Manhattan; 917-599-8140, page-nyc.com.



Dana Lok's "Causal Wedge (Front)," from 2020, at Page (NYC) gallery. Dana Lok and Page

How would the world look if you could stand outside time? That's the heady question behind "One Second Per Second," a lush but tightly focused suite of paintings by the young Brooklyn artist Dana Lok. In the largest two, "Causal Wedge (Front)" and "Causal Wedge (Back)," a veil of neon mist parts to reveal a single foot trampling through the mud. Simple orange butterflies — perhaps a reference to the "butterfly effect" — flutter around in the tall grass. Jagged receding borders at the top of this vision suggest that it's not just one instant Ms. Lok has her sights on, but a contiguous train of them. But what makes the concept work is that she doesn't linger over the details. It's just an uncommon way of highlighting what is, after all, the heart of most figurative painting — the strange and magical problem of fixing a moment in time.

Megan Marrin

Through Nov. 21. Queer Thoughts, 373 Broadway, Manhattan; 212-680-0116, queerthoughts.com.

An installation view of “Convalescence,” Megan Marrin’s solo exhibition of new work at Queer Thoughts gallery. Megan Marrin and Queer Thoughts

After finishing a body of work about the life and death cycle, the New York painter Megan Marrin, in need of some conceptual recovery, began researching spas and wellness. But she eventually narrowed her focus to a single emblematic object and put together a small but memorable show, “Convalescence,” comprising four ominous paintings of the Edwardian sanitarium fixture known as the rib cage shower. Filling their tall and narrow canvases more or less exactly, these devices look like skeletons — almost alien but weirdly familiar — in cross-sections of shadowy flesh. They bring to mind all sorts of disquieting questions about luxury, technology and the sexual undercurrents of the industrial world. Do we shape our environment or does it shape us? Is the desire for comfort a product of the death drive? And just what are we after, anyway, when we design a bathroom? The paintings’ bilious colors and sticky-looking surfaces only amplify their psychological effect.

The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/arts/design/art-gallery-shows.html

ART REVIEWS

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Ceramic sculptures; warped photographs; floral still lifes; treasures in a trash collection; and swoops of acrylic indigo.

Published Aug. 21, 2019 Updated Aug. 22, 2019

Simone Fattal

Through Sept. 2. MoMA PS1, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, Queens; 718-784-2084, momaps1.org.

The Lebanese artist Simone Fattal seems to make small ceramic sculptures the way some artists dash off fast, skillful sketches. There's a sense of intoxicating speed and wry pleasure in their loose, sometimes clumsy forms and usually bright uneven surfaces. Like the best drawn sketches, these works also have an uncanny accuracy in their approximations of the real world. The colorful parade of 170 pieces, made from 1988 to 2019 dominating "Works and Days," Ms. Fattal's sumptuous, and first, solo museum exhibition in the United States, conveys a strong sense of ancient cultures, recent wars, personal memory and the erosions of time.

Many forms — which include damaged houses, abandoned walls in deserts and limbless tree trunks — suggest ruins or relics, as perhaps befits an artist who lived in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war, before decamping to California in 1980. Some titles establish meaning, for example, identifying with bitter irony a pile of small glazed gun-like sticks in a possible Quonset hut as "Weapons of Mass Destruction," or imbuing cursory figures with the weight of myth, as in "Agamemnon," "Siren," "Visitation," or "Warrior." Other titles simply confirm what the eye may already suspect, as with "Lion," "Ziggurat," "Turtle" or "Window."

Organized by Ruba Katrib, curator at MoMA PS1, this show includes paintings dating back to 1969, some of which, like "Submerged Landscape" (1969) are excellent, and several consistently convincing groups of works on paper. Among the best are five large collages dated 2011 to 2016, whose intricate arrays of images teem with the cultural references and personal experiences that Ms. Fattal's sculptures so effortlessly synthesized. *ROBERTA SMITH*

'The leaden circles dissolved in the air'

Through Aug. 25. Transmitter, 1329 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn; 646-389-9407, transmitter.nyc.

Carrie Yamaoka's "untitled photograph 1," from 1997, in which she aimed her camera at a warped piece of Mylar, instead of directly at her subject. via Transmitter

Carrie Yamaoka and Joy Episalla are both New York artists who work in the murky borderlands among photography, sculpture and painting. Their joint show at Transmitter Gallery in Bushwick, Brooklyn, "The leaden circles dissolved in the air," is named for Virginia Woolf's recurring evocation of the striking hours in "Mrs. Dalloway." And the objects included — stained reflective films; a flickering, black-and-white, abstract video installation in a corner — do all revolve around the passage of time. Because the two artists are also a long standing couple, though, I couldn't help seeing the show mainly as the portrait of a marriage.

Two “foldtograms” (folded photograms) by Ms. Episalla, more or less crumpled sheets of glossy black photo paper, encapsulate the creative power of commitment. Simply by choosing to keep and display these particular sheets, the artist charges all the little accidents time has inflicted on them — the wrinkles, the cracks, the discoloration — with identity and meaning.

Ms. Yamaoka’s “untitled photograph 1,” on the other hand, which shows Ms. Episalla stretched out naked in bed, demonstrates how to be honest about your own limitations: By aiming her camera at a warped piece of reflective Mylar, instead of directly at her partner, Ms. Yamaoka manages to include herself, and her own position, in the picture. She also distorts the whole with handsome wobbles that remind you of the medium’s incompleteness and ambiguity without actually interfering with what the piece communicates — love, trust, obsession, and bravado. *WILL HEINRICH*

Ed Baynard

Through Sept. 7. White Columns, 91 Horatio Street, Manhattan; 212-924-4212, whitecolumns.org.

“Untitled,” by Ed Baynard, from 1999. via White Columns

Ed Baynard’s biography is exponentially flashier than his floral still-life paintings. He was a graphic designer for the Beatles, a clothing designer for Jimi Hendrix, worked for Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and appeared in Jack Smith’s incendiary underground film, “Flaming Creatures” (1963). Nonetheless, this exhibition at White Columns, which encompasses five decades of Mr. Baynard’s work, ripples with visual wit and occasional sedition.

Mr. Baynard’s mainstay was a vase of flowers painted with watercolor in a flat, design-like manner that recalls Japanese Ukiyo-e prints, Alex Katz paintings or Andy Warhol paint-by-numbers compositions. The vases themselves are like trapdoors into other worlds, featuring detailed landscapes or smaller mise en abyme, still lifes within the still life.

The contrast between his exciting lifestyle and the staid genre of still-life painting wasn’t lost on Mr. Baynard. A framed poster for a 1971 gallery show of his work, which is here, includes a short text by Mr. Baynard in which he ruminates on order versus chaos and structure versus freedom. His paintings swing between these poles: They are tightly structured and yet tiny sparks of chaos — promiscuous

blossoms, rogue washes of paint or a flamboyant frog flying toward the edge of a composition — erupt within otherwise placidly ordered canvases, suggesting the way subversion or even revolution might emerge from the quietest of quarters. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

'What Is Here Is Open: Selections From the Treasures in the Trash Collection'

Through Sept. 14. Hunter East Harlem Gallery, 2180 Third Avenue, Manhattan; 212-396-7819, huntereastharlemgallery.org.

An installation of found photographs, journals and trinkets, alongside photographs by the artist Dominique Duroseau. via Hunter East Harlem Gallery; Stan Narten

One of New York's hallmarks is its curbside culture — the way people leave all manner of items on the street for the taking, such as toasters, baby bathtubs and magazines. Nelson Molina knows this side of the city well. For more than 30 years, the Department of Sanitation worker, now retired, picked up objects left along his route in East Harlem. As his collection grew to fill a whole floor of a sanitation garage, he gave it a name: Treasures in the Trash Museum.

For "What Is Here Is Open," the artist and curator Alicia Grullón placed work by seven local artists alongside some of Mr. Molina's treasures, collaborating with him on the installation. The result looks like part art gallery, part thrift store. Shellyne Rodriguez's loving re-creation of the cover of her mother's favorite album by the boogaloo musician Joe Bataan hangs with a mix of LPs. Dominique Duroseau's defiant self-portraits dominate a table crowded with found family photos. Coronado Print Collective has cleverly repurposed an amNew York newspaper box.

All the artworks are a step removed from life — a transmutation of the everyday into something more singular. Their presence casts the intimate, mundane and kitschy objects that surround them as inspiring source material. Together, the treasures and the trash reaffirm a human need to express ourselves creatively, and remind us that making art is just one way. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

Henni Alftan, Matt Hilvers, Ruth Ige, Andrew Sim

Through Sept. 15. Karma Gallery, 188 East Second Street, Manhattan; 212-390-8290, karmakarma.org.

Henni Alftan's "Tiptoeing" (2019) at Karma Gallery. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris; Henni Alftan and Karma Gallery

Ruth Ige's "Amongst the Winds and Waves," from 2019. Ruth Ige and Karma Gallery

Four separate painting shows currently fill as many consecutive rooms at Karma Gallery. What they have in common is a tight focus on the way we take in and construct images. The Glasgow-based Andrew Sim, in the first room, makes gentle pastels with titles like "A tree with twin trunks." But by including a yeti and a U.F.O. among these restful scenes, he reminds us that nature, too, is constructed by the imagination.

Henni Alftan, born in Helsinki and working in Paris, paints our *ideas* of how things look — colorful, sharp-edged, a little flat. (A fine pair of small paintings, both called "Tiptoeing," neatly argue that it's her stockings that shape a woman's ankles and not vice versa.) Matt Hilvers, the show's only American, looks at the strange way words can dance and combine when they're peeled away from the objects they refer to. In "Culture (Car) (Positioned)," curving bits of highway spell the word "Culture" against a bright, schematic landscape.

In the final room, Ruth Ige, who was born in Nigeria and lives in New Zealand, uses figuration like a weight to hold down great swoops of acrylic indigo, cerulean and gray. This figurative weight, though head-shaped and solid black, is the opposite of a silhouette. Its blackness isn't neutral or empty but full and mysterious, a place where gestures and moods concentrate into unknowable density. *WILL HEINRICH*