

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By **Roberta Smith, Martha Schwendener and Will Heinrich**

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‘LYRIC ON A BATTLEFIELD’

Through Aug. 4. Gladstone Gallery, 515 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 212-206-9300, gladstonegallery.com.

More gallery group shows should have the rich connective tissue of this one. It brings together works by 13 artists of different nationalities, ages and mediums, some unknown here, and has been organized by Miciah Hussey, director of artist relations at the Gladstone Gallery. The title comes from a line of Adrienne Rich’s 2009 poem “Quarto”: “No one writes lyric on a battlefield.” But of course we all do, especially artists: Lyric is poetry as autobiography and the battlefield is life. The desires and tensions of the struggle, usually pertaining to women or gay men, are felt throughout this show. Anne Collier’s large color photograph of vintage cue cards — perhaps for teachers of fiction writing — sets the stage by asking, “Are there other ways to interpret this information?” Indeed.

Some works outshine the others. Senga Nengudi’s “Rapunzel,” a large staged photograph from 1981, pushes fairy tale into nightmare, and Ellen Berkenblit’s painting shows her signature pointy-nosed heroine, who blends with and confronts an abstract jangle of color and fabric. Kandis Williams’s “Cervical Smile” takes on the feigned happiness demanded of women from pre-Freudian times forward; it might be titled “From Hysteria to Hollywood.” The three paintings from Dawn Mellor’s series of exuberantly vandalized celebrity portraits are among her best, ambiguously balancing what has been done to the canvas and to its subject. In her painting “Reg Park and the Hard Gainers,” Suzanne McClelland scatters cyclones of dark marks and smears with contrasting body measurements and weights. Maybe competing boxers? Reg Park is the father of modern bodybuilding; hardgainers are devotees who don’t achieve results. The painting portrays a man desperate to be manlier.

Seen in New York for the first time, the work by the Canadian artist Liz Magor consists of two sculptures: enigmatic, seemingly lost parcels on the floor. Each is a paper bag containing a large wrapped box and a pair of old-fashioned hosiery still in cellophane. The colors and surfaces of the papers are overly intense and matched to the hosiery; secrets of the flesh are sensed, displaced and remain hidden. Also new to New York are the extraordinary little tableaux of f.maquespenteado, a Brazilian-born artist based in Portugal. Assembling texts, found objects and materials — some of them embroidered with gorgeously colored portraits — he creates exquisite vignettes that are arch yet poignant studies in loneliness, companioned or not.

ROBERTA SMITH

‘TEMPLE OF MANUFACTURING’

Through Aug. 5. Storefront for Art and Architecture, 97 Kenmare Street, Manhattan; 212-431-5795, storefrontnews.org.

The motto of the Finnish design team Company (Aamu Song and Johan Olin) seems to be “Three is a crowd, but two is indeed a company.”

In their New York debut, however, the pair play up crowding, covering the entire interior of the Storefront for Art and Architecture — including the wonderful pivoting doors that dominate its idiosyncratic Vito Acconci design — with objects, parts of objects, materials, murals and scores of design sketches and drawings, all buoyed by a floor painted extra-bright turquoise. Perhaps best taken as an art installation, this presentation is also an archive, a

promotional feat and a plea for hands-on, low-tech production. A folksy assembly line begins as a mural and then angles out into the space with a row of small wood orbs on sticks, three abreast, like an army of lollipops. Narrow shelves completely line the doors, marshaling spools of thread, the wood spheres and glass ones, too.

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Ms. Song and Mr. Olin have tempered the phrase “global economy” by paying long visits to Japan, Russia, Estonia, the Pennsylvania Amish country and remote parts of Finland, seeking artisans with whom to revive and update traditional crafts and objects, usually with Company designs. Some collaborations are featured here at little altarlike work stations displaying tools and partly made products alongside finished ones. Among the best is a Japanese hanten, or padded jacket, in indigo fabric patterned with eyes. An Amish quasi-hanten covered with bright quilting is iffier. The designers’ capacity for cuteness and witty tchotchkes can sometimes wear thin, but their international design wonderland is not to be missed.

ROBERTA SMITH



An installation view of “New York Golem,” the Gelatin collective’s show at Greene Naftali. Courtesy of the artists and Greene Naftali, New York

GELATIN

Through Aug. 4. Greene Naftali, 508 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-463-7770, greenenaftaligallery.com.

Playful and puerile, the current show from the collective Gelatin, “New York Golem,” at Greene Naftali, corresponds with the ethos of its earlier work as well as the long history of Austrian art provocateurs like Egon Schiele, the Vienna Actionists, Valie Export and Franz West.

The “golems” are abstract ceramic sculptures that the male artists made by pressing or wrapping clay around their genitals. The objects are displayed on pedestals made of buckets, flower pots, furniture or other traditionally nonart materials. The use of unorthodox pedestals is not particularly radical: It goes back to Brancusi and up through artists like Jessica Stockholder, Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison.

Rather, the anti-art gesture of art “made” with penises is the focus here. (Although the penis also has quite a history in art, including comparisons of the paintbrush-as-penis and Brancusi’s baldly phallic sculptures.) A gallery news release written in syntax-challenged English needles viewers even further, describing the golems in airy, aesthetic terms: “The plinth lifts the ceramic gracefully to give it space to unfold. More than 40 of these New York golems come to life in the gallery. Every ceramic rests on an individually designed plinth and is ready for a closer inspection. Come and touch their feeling.” And sure, why not?

For those familiar with this collective’s work, the only thing that detracts from this show is Gelatin’s own history, with spectacular gestures like “Tantamounter 24/7” (2005), a “live” photocopier with the artists sealed inside, or “Weltwunder” (2000), a work you had to experience underwater. Then there’s the memory of its first show at Greene Naftali, in which viewers could watch the artists make sculptures, live and blindfolded. When compared with these feats and provocations, the penis imprints feel tame, even tasteful.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Inka Essenhigh’s “Study for Monsters of Manhattan” (2016), at Shrine. Courtesy of the artist and Shrine

‘ANOTHER PLACE’

Through Sept. 3. Shrine, 191 Henry Street, Manhattan; 347-693-4979, shrine.nyc.

There’s a smoky texture of hypnagogic disorientation on Henry Street inside the artist-run space Shrine. Loose but elaborate figurative work by a dozen painters and sculptors, all of it small scale and much of it held together by a shared palette of purples and browns, makes for a desperately welcome getaway into the cool fertility of unworldly private fantasy.

In “Study for Monsters of Manhattan,” Inka Essenhigh paints three mysterious women with watery lines and finely observed anatomical details. Alice Mackler’s earthenware figure combines squeezes, pokes and thumbprints with a rooster-colored glaze, creating a startling mannequin of bright-eyed psychological defiance. Kevin McNamee-Tweed’s winning monoprints look like plates from a hobo history of civilization, and in Charlie Roberts’s trippy lavender acrylic of a charismatic dancing house plant, apparently rough edges belie a deeply satisfying sense of balance.

Hawkins Bolden’s “Untitled (Scarecrow),” from the late 1980s, at Shrine. Courtesy of the artist and Shrine

The single most lingering detail may be on one of two untitled works by Hawkins Bolden (1914-2005), who lost his sight as a child in Memphis and spent much of his life assembling found junk into scarecrows for his garden. The headless figure is composed of a plastic torso from a child’s doll whose arms and legs have been removed and reattached. Three jagged holes pierce the figure’s chest and abdomen, where the nipples and navel would be, as if to form a simple face, and a modest tangle of metal wire emerges from two of the holes. Plastic gears are visible through the neck. But it’s the cruciform arms, designed to look as if they’re reaching for a hug, that I’m still thinking about. Bolden put them on backward.

WILL HEINRICH