

ART & DESIGN | Beat the Heat With These 10 Must-See Art Shows



A model of “The Harp” (1939), inspired by the hymn “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Savage’s nearly 16-foot-tall sculpture, created for the 1939 World’s Fair, was later destroyed.

Augusta Savage and World’s Fair Committee; University of North Florida, Thomas G. Carpenter Library Special Collections and Archives

This is not the retrospective that is due Augusta Savage (1892-1962), an important sculptor, teacher and activist prominent in the Harlem Renaissance. Yet, with only 19 examples of her roughly 90 known surviving works, “Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman” may be the exhibition that’s needed first. Its meticulous contextualization of Savage’s life and work is a moving, informative introduction to one of the most heroic careers in 20th-century American art.

Organized by the art historian Jeffrey M. Hayes at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens in Jacksonville, Fla., the show is peppered with photographs, letters and works by other artists who were inspired or taught by Savage during her active years in Harlem. It vividly conveys the world that she determinedly created for herself, against the odds of poverty, sexism and racism, which it also makes apparent.

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Read the contemptuous expressions on many of the white faces — along with Savage’s seeming alienation — in two photographs taken at the opening in 1939 of Savage’s short-lived gallery, the Salon of Contemporary Negro Art in Harlem. The salon followed by seven years the art school she had established in her studio in 1932, upon returning from study in Paris, where her teachers had included the French sculptor Charles Despiau (1874-1946), best known for his portrait busts.

On view are early unfamiliar works by some of Savage’s students and friends including Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Selma Burke and Gwendolyn Knight and her husband, Jacob Lawrence. Knight sat for one of Savage’s spirited, resolute portrait busts. The photographs also reveal lost works in a tantalizing range of styles. Those here stick mostly to a realistic mode that is less conservative than first appears. (As with the American painters known as the Eight, her figures have an intensity and material looseness that undermines academicism.)

Part of Savage’s radicalness lies in her determination — one shared with many black artists today — to populate art with active representatives of black life. The show includes Savage’s “Reclining Nude” (1932), carved in a light brown marble, whose gracefully coiled pose, not at all horizontal, seems at once self-protective and assertive.

Savage, who would die in obscurity, was the only black female artist commissioned to make a sculpture for the New York World's Fair in 1939. The result, "The Harp," seen here in a small bronze "souvenir" version, depicts a black choir in a swooping shape that conjures both the title and music itself. The original, in bronzed plaster, was nearly 16 feet tall and Savage could neither afford to cast it in bronze nor put it in storage — like many such works, it was destroyed. The exhibition opens with a blown-up image of Savage looking proudly at "Realization," a powerful 1938 sculpture of a dispirited man and woman that conveys the weariness of being oppressed. It never made it beyond its forcefully modeled nearly life-size clay version. It's heartbreaking to think the difference its survival might have made.

ROBERTA SMITH

Through July 28; 212-873-3400, nyhistory.org.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

'One: Egúngún'



"Egúngún Masquerade Dance Costume (paka egúngún)" by a Yoruba artist, circa 1920-1948. via Brooklyn Museum

A sample of the Brooklyn Museum's compact exhibitions built around a single work, "One: Egúngún" documents an impressive sleuthing exercise. It concerns an egúngún costume, of the kind that appears in Yoruba culture when the ancestors manifest as masked figures, also called egúngún, on special occasions.

This particular costume is an elaborate multilayered assemblage of fabrics in vertical strips on a wide frame, so as to produce a whirlwind effect when the wearer dances. It arrived at the museum as a gift in 1998, with little information about its provenance. Last year, Kristen Windmuller-Luna, the museum's new curator of African art, traveled to Nigeria to investigate. Consulting with Nigerian art historians, she managed to locate the family, in the town of Ogbomoshó, from whose shrine — she learned from the elders — the egúngún was stolen in 1948. A divination ceremony confirmed that the costume is no longer spiritually charged, and thus may be displayed.

It's a measure of how impoverished the presentation of African objects remains that "One: Egúngún" feels so innovative; ideally, such effort would be standard. In one video, the elders, scholars, and Nigerian artists explain the egúngún practice and how it has changed. Vintage 1986 footage by the art historian Henry Drewal shows a similar egúngún in action. Other displays address the fabrics that the egúngún contains. The wall text, in English and Yoruba, includes testimonial by a leader of Brooklyn's Yoruba community.

The show may or may not satisfy critics who objected to Ms. Windmuller-Luna's appointment because she is white. It contributes, however, to the crucial debate on African art repatriation. In their report to France's president, the scholars Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr advocated not only the principle of restitution, but an ethos of "re-circulation" of works, in dynamic context, under African guidance. "One: Egúngún" offers an example in this spirit, well worth emulating. *SIDDHARTHA MITTER*

Through Aug. 18; 718-638-5000, brooklynmuseum.org.

QUEENS MUSEUM

Alexandria Smith

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An installation view of Alexandria Smith's exhibition, "Monuments to an Effigy," via the Queens Museum; Hai Zhang

Outside the entrance to Alexandria Smith's "Monuments to an Effigy," a Plexiglas panel has been painted to look like stained glass. The theme of worship continues inside the gallery with two antique wooden pews that hover off the floor. They're echoed by two found African masks perched atop imitation Tuscan Doric columns, which have been set against black glitter fabric. On another wall, a triptych of drawings and paintings by Ms. Smith suggests an ascent from the underworld to heaven, with figures whose graphically rendered body parts are arranged to make them look like angels.

Layered over all this is an original aria with gospel tonality sung by Liz Gré. Her haunting, searching soprano helps hold together an installation that is a *mélange* but also a reverent whole.

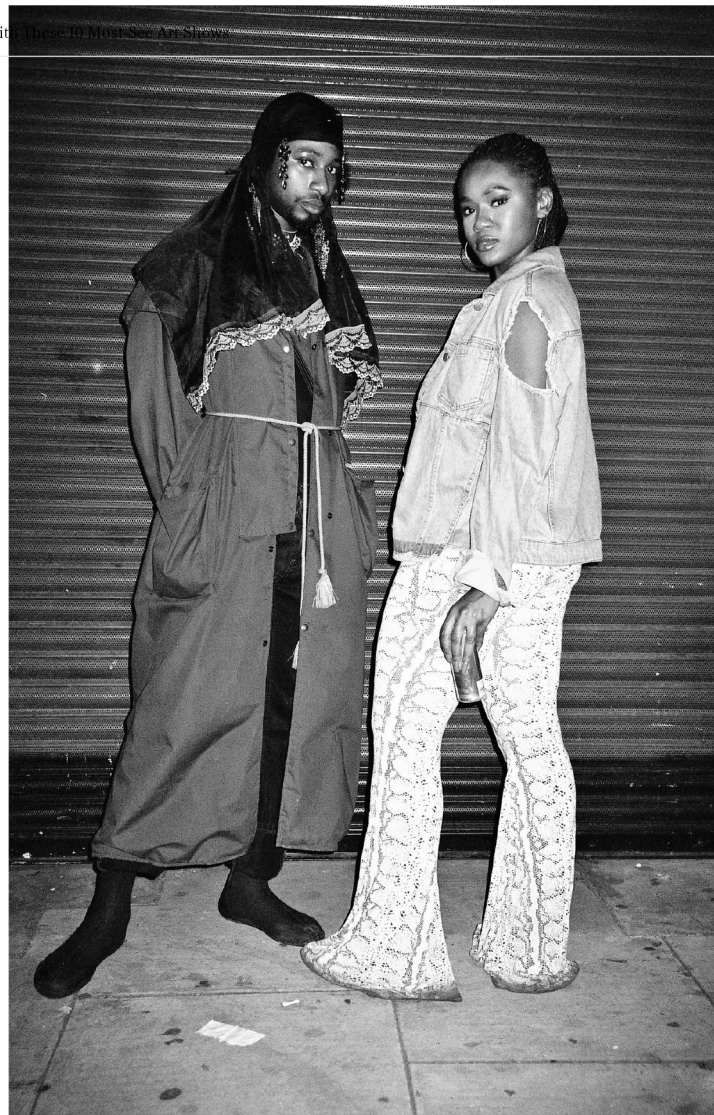
The starting point for this work was the Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground, a few miles from the Queens Museum. In the mid-19th century, the small cemetery was a resting place for victims of epidemics; after that, local African-American and Native American residents were mostly buried there until 1898. Once the century turned, the graveyard met the same fate as many others in New York City: It became a park, then a playground. Only in the early 2000s was it again recognized as a burial ground, thanks largely to a member of the nearby Macedonia A.M.E. Church of Flushing, whose members had been interred there. (A 1996 archaeological study identified 97 people who had been entombed at the site, and recent research found more.)

A reference corner behind the gallery provides this information and more, including interviews and books that served as resources for the artists' work. I recommend spending time there and then returning to the installation, where you may see Ms. Smith's invocation of her ancestors, specifically black women, anew. She juxtaposes evocations of absence, such as the empty pews, with objects that assert their presence, like a sculpture of oversize, tentacle-like pigtails. In the balance, she's found a way to honor a past that has been only partly exhumed. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

Through Aug. 18; 718-592-9700, queensmuseum.org.



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“Untitled (PDA),” 2018. Liz Johnson Artur

“Untitled (PDA),” 2018. Liz Johnson Artur

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Liz Johnson Artur's "Black Balloon Archive," 1992. Liz Johnson Artur

Trying to guess the identity of a photographer by her images is a dubious game, as Liz Johnson Artur proves in her exhibition "Dusha" at the Brooklyn Museum. Born in Bulgaria of Russian and Ghanaian descent, Ms. Johnson Artur's images focus on neighborhoods in London, Brooklyn and Russia, and they were made by an artist who is of mixed heritage: a brown-skinned Russian and a Russian-speaking African.

In 1991, Ms. Johnson Artur started what she calls the "Black Balloon Archive," after the 1969 song, by the soul singer Syl Johnson. (The exhibition title, "Dusha," means "soul" in Russian.) Deeply saturated color portraits from that archive are presented as grids or in display cases. Videos like "Real ... Times" (2018) narrate the stories of London immigrant enclaves, and "AfroRussia" (2010-19) features Russians of African and Caribbean descent. ("I went to Russia to hear stories in Russian by Russians who look like me," Ms. Johnson Artur says in a wall text here.)

Some of the best works, however, are street photographs of Brooklyn, with dancers in ecstatic poses and audiences urging them on. As a photographer for fashion and music magazines like *i-D*, *The Face* and *Vibe*, Ms. Johnson Artur has specialized in people for whom self-fashioning is a way of life. The portraits of people at the east London nightclub PDA (Public Display of Affection) argue for beads, hair and costumes as political statements in which gender and identity can be, in the words of the philosopher Judith Butler, “performed.”

Coming from what were conceptually opposite poles — white Russia and black Africa — Ms. Johnson Artur has forged her own path within the realm of identity politics. She has something to teach New Yorkers, who often pride themselves on their diversity. Ms. Johnson Artur’s “Dusha” pushes the definition further, to encompass individuals who embrace less singular positions. Forget labels, she’s saying. You can be many things. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

Through Aug. 18; 718-638-5000, brooklynmuseum.org.

MORE MUST-SEE SHOWS RECOMMENDED BY OUR CRITICS

[The Whitney Biennial: Young Art Cross-Stitched With Politics](#) May 16, 2019

[The Guggenheim’s Collection, as Seen by Six Art Stars](#) June 27, 2019

[Sculpture, Both Botanical and Bestial, Awe at the Met Breuer](#) July 11, 2019

[What Leonardo da Vinci Couldn’t Finish](#) July 11, 2019

NEUE GALERIE

‘Eclipse of the Sun: Art of the Weimar Republic’



George Grosz's "Eclipse of the Sun," from 1926, caricatures the Weimar establishment as a rat's nest of corruption.

Estate of George Grosz/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; The Heckscher Museum of Art

Just a few rooms of the Neue Galerie are open this summer (admission is consequently halved), yet this Fifth Avenue treasure house of German and Austrian art has bagged a significant loan that justifies a pilgrimage for lovers of 1920s Weltschmerz — which, to judge by the popularity of Netflix’s Weimar soap opera “*Babylon Berlin*,” is quite a lot of us.

George Grosz's mordant, topsy-turvy "Eclipse of the Sun," painted in 1926 and borrowed from the Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington, Long Island, caricatures the Weimar establishment as a rat's nest of corruption, lorded over by a corpulent, clown-faced President Paul von Hindenburg in screamingly gaudy militaria. He's heeding the demands of a top-hatted capitalist who susurrates in his ear, while a dopey donkey, its blinders emblazoned with the Weimar eagle, grazes atop the baize table next to Hindenburg's bloody bayonet.

Grosz paints this scene from above, as steeply raked as a theater stage, but this is no cabaret amusement. Behind them a city burns to the ground, while a barely discernible prisoner languishes in one shadowy corner.

"Eclipse of the Sun" anchors a summer showcase that is much angstier than your average beach read — one of media-induced alienation, changing gender roles, rampant inequality and a democracy at the breaking point. (No points for guessing why Weimar is back in fashion!)

A half-dozen impassive portraits by Otto Dix exemplify the cold exactitude of the Neue Sachlichkeit, or New Objectivity; so does another Grosz of a reader with a glass eye, skin waxy, veins bulging. The movement's shrewdest painter remains Christian Schad, whose full-frontal "Two Girls" (1928), one of whom offers a master class in manual stimulation, makes sex appear as pleasurable as an autopsy. Not safe for work? Schad's pitiless gaze on desire is hardly safe for the museum. JASON FARAGO

Through Sept. 2; 212-994-9493, neuegalerie.org.

MOMA PS1

'MOOD: Studio Museum Artists in Residence'

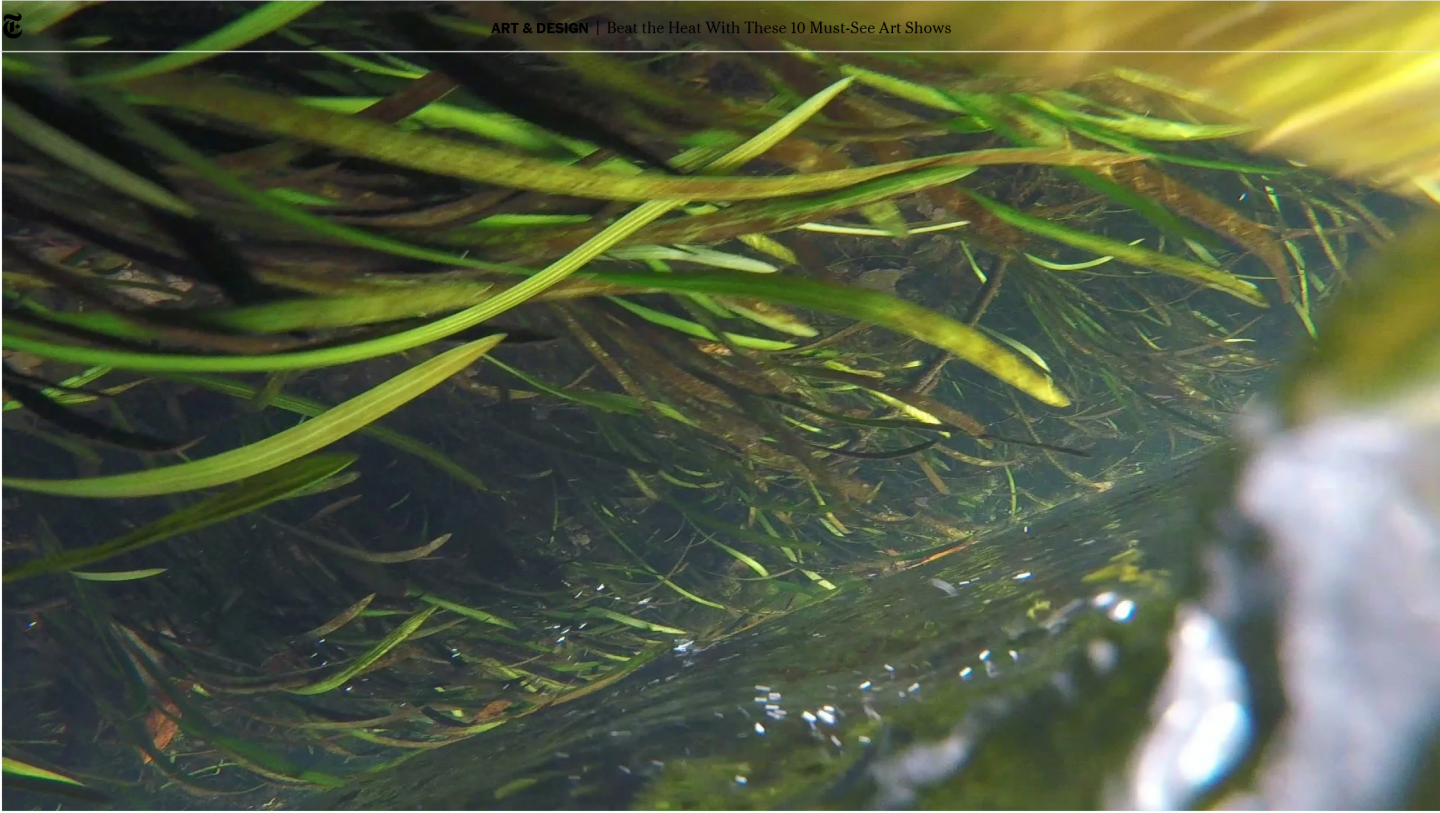


Tschabalala Self's "Red Dog," 2019. Tschabalala Self and Pilar Corrias Gallery



Sable Elyse Smith's "Coloring Book 31," 2019. Sable Elyse Smith

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A still from Allison Janae Hamilton's "Wacissa," a single-channel video projection from 2019. Allison Janae Hamilton

The Studio Museum in Harlem is a movable feast these days. With a new David Adjaye-designed headquarters under construction on West 125th Street, the museum is distributing its exhibitions among various locations around town. Its annual artists-in-residence show has found a berth at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City, Queens.

Now 50 years old, the residence program has long had a reputation for being a career clincher, though it could be argued that this year's three participants — Allison Janae Hamilton, Tschabalala Self and Sable Elyse Smith — were already en route to stardom. It's also worth noting that, strategically and tonally, this year's edition, with its formally experimental, slow-release explorations into the politics of African-American life, is very much of a piece with the excellent, and overlapping, 2019 Whitney Biennial.

Ms. Hamilton attracted attention two years ago in the Studio Museum's new-artist survey "Fictions" with an installation evoking the uncanny atmosphere of the pine forests of northern Florida where she grew up, terrain with distinctive flora and fauna (now threatened by climate change) and a hard history of African-American labor. With an expanded use of sculpture, and video in her new work, she pushes the atmosphere of her earlier work from merely dreamy to mystical in a suspenseful narrative that takes us deep into woods, far under water, to a realm where the force of nature is both baptismal and diluvial.

The mood — to use the show's title — turns rowdily ebullient in Ms. Self's "Street Series," textile-collage paintings of large-scale figures inspired by the black population of the artist's native turf, Harlem. Ms. Self — whose work recently produced sensational auction results at Christie's — draws on the formal example of artists past (Benny Andrews, Faith Ringgold, Bill Traylor) to conjure an urban scene that feels both archetypal and closely observed, and physically immediate in a wraparound installation.

The world evoked by Ms. Smith's mixed-media work is America's prison industrial complex, where hoarded food is a form of currency; every design decision is shaped by surveillance; and promotional material — coloring books made for the visiting children of inmates — promotes a promise of social harmony precisely the opposite of what incarceration creates. The title of her 2017 solo exhibition at the Queens Museum, "Ordinary Violence," captures the low-volume, high-intensity nature of an art that gets sharper and subtler show by the show, and looks particularly strong in this one. *HOLLAND COTTER*

Through Sept. 8; 718-784-2084, moma.org.



T. C. Cannon's painting "Two Guns Arikara" (1974-77). Estate of T. C. Cannon

In 31 years, T.C. Cannon made more stunning artworks than some artists make in much longer lifetimes. The retrospective "T.C. Cannon: At the Edge of America" brings together his polychromatic paintings of Native Americans, intimate drawings commenting on the country's violent history and original poetry, folk songs and letters to emphasize the full breadth of his singularly hybrid vision. That he made so much mature work in so many mediums before dying in a car accident in 1978 is all the more remarkable.

The artist was born in 1946 — and given the name Tommy Wayne Cannon — to a Caddo mother and Kiowa father in Oklahoma. His brief life blended aspects of Native and white American cultures: He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in New Mexico and, briefly, the San Francisco Art Institute; he enrolled in the Kiowa Tribe and the United States Army, serving in Vietnam. He idolized Bob Dylan and celebrated the rebellious resurgence of traditional Native American religious ceremonies. (The national ban on them was lifted shortly after he died.)

All these elements made their way into his art, both subtly and overtly. The painting "Soldiers" (1970) merges a Native American and a colonial fighter, suggesting not only this country's foundational genocide but also the internalized conflict of being an oppressed person who fought in the oppressor's Army.

In Mr. Cannon's most powerful works, he brings Modernist styles — most notably Post-Impressionism and Fauvism — to bear on portraits of Native Americans. There are echoes of Matisse in his ambush of colors and patterns, and shades of van Gogh in his animation of the landscape. (You can also sense a more contemporary influence, Pop art.) But paintings like "Two Guns Arikara" (1974-77) and "Indian With Beaded Headdress" (1978) demonstrate his irrefutable originality. He treats his subjects with artistic reverence, while allowing them to remain at an emotional remove. Their austere expressions read like a quiet challenge to a society that refuses to accept them. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

Through Sept. 16; 212-514-3705, americanindian.si.edu.

ART & DESIGN | Beat the Heat With These 10 Must-See Art Shows



Marta Minujín's "The Woman's Head." Immersive installations abound in the artist's exhibition at the New Museum. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Minujín's "The Neon Tunnel." Jeenah Moon for The New York Times



Minujín's "The Swamp." Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

In its way, "Marta Minujín: Menesunda Reloaded," which fills the New Museum's third floor, is one of the best shows of the summer. It replicates a legendary moment in the history of mid-century avant-gardism that you may not have known existed, and it does so with a vividness and immediacy that amounts to time travel.

It returns to Buenos Aires in 1965 when the young Argentine artist Marta Minujín, aided by the artist Ruben Santantonin, built a multi-chamber labyrinth named "La Menesunda," slang for "a confusing situation." This immersive combination of happening, performance and installation was concocted out of whatever cheap colorful materials the artists could find. Brilliant use was made of foam rubber and police tape, among much else. Shown at the city's Instituto Di Tella, it caused a sensation, dominating television news for days and causing lines around the block.

The "reloaded" version of "La Menesunda" here — its D.I.Y. character intact — has also inspired lines, since only a few people can enter the work at once. Its funky, visceral combinations of the tactile and the visual alternate disorientingly between subjective experience and social commentary.

I entered the work through a gaudy arbor of vine-like neon. Stairways led to a progression of rooms, corridors, dark corners and stairways. These include (spoiler alert) a comfortably middle-class couple reading in bed, and a fully equipped makeup artist in a pink room ready to work on me or any other willing victim. One room felt like an icebox, the next contained a forest of contrasting textures that I found briefly claustrophobic. There are teasing glimpses of the huge painted papier-mâché head of a beautiful brunette — perhaps a comment on the ubiquity of the female face in advertising — and, at midpoint, a lettuce-spinner-like room that you must negotiate in order to proceed. The finale is an exercise in self-glorification: an eight-sided room that lights up when one person steps into a phone-booth size box at its center, revealing an infinity of self-reflections. Narcissism, anyone?

As seen here, “La Menesunda” is in its iconoclastic energy and raw materiality very much of its counterculture era, in step with environmental and social works by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Hélio Oiticica and Yayoi Kusama. But its refusal of a single viewpoint, a dominant material or centralized narrative gives a fractured quality that makes it very much of the moment. **ROBERTA SMITH**

Through Sept. 29; 212-219-1222, newmuseum.org.

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Simone Leigh



“Jug,” 2019.
Simone Leigh and Luhring Augustine, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; David Heald



“Panoptica,” 2019.
Simone Leigh and Luhring Augustine, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; David Heald

Simone Leigh’s sensuous, majestic sculptures of black female figures fuse the language of African village architecture and African-American folk art, and sometimes racial stereotypes, like the “mammy” figurines produced and collected in earlier eras in America. Sculpture is only one part of the practice that earned Ms. Leigh the Hugo Boss Prize 2018, but it is the one that inspired the show “Loophole of Retreat,” at the Guggenheim.

Ms. Leigh’s three large objects sit in a gallery off the rotunda. “Jug” (2019) joins a vessel and a burnished woman’s body with truncated arms. “Sentinel” and “Panoptica,” both from 2019, turn bodies into architectural structures complete with raffia, which suggests a thatched roof.

The title “Loophole of Retreat” comes from the writings of Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman who became an abolitionist, but not before Jacobs had spent seven years hiding in a crawl space below the garret in her grandmother’s home, to escape her master’s advances. (She recounted her story in “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.”) Jacobs found in this confined space a pathway to freedom. In the exhibition,

the “loophole” becomes a kind of artistic conceit, too, in which Ms. Leigh moves deftly between mediums, styles and messages, addressing multiple audiences — but always, as she has stated, black women.

Ms. Leigh’s extraordinary reach into the world — the show here also includes a sound work, a film program and a broadsheet written by the scholar Saidiya Hartman — uses art as a platform. Elsewhere she has created, under the aegis of art, a free medical clinic and turned a residency at the New Museum into a healing space offering yoga, massage and other services.

For Ms. Leigh, loopholes might include representations of women that link back to ancestors or empower women by drawing on the freedom available through art. In that sense, the sculptures in “Loophole of Retreat” are sentinels, and placeholders. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

Through Oct. 27; 212-423-3500, guggenheim.org.

Read more about Simone Leigh and her work

Works include an outdoor installation near Hudson Yards.

‘Brick House’ Is Installed at the High Line April 4, 2019



An Artist Ascendant: Simone Leigh Moves Into the Mainstream Aug. 29, 2018



THE FRICK

Edmund de Waal

Edmund de Waal’s 2019 sculpture “from darkness to darkness” at the Frick. The work is flanked by a pair of 1565 Paolo Veronese paintings, “The Choice Between Virtue and Vice,” left, and “Wisdom and Strength,” right. David Williams for The New York Times

Consider just one room, the Living Hall, in the Gilded Age mansion of Henry Clay Frick, the industrialist and art patron. El Greco’s wearily punctilious St. Jerome, looking down from his place above the fireplace, is flanked by Holbein’s Thomas Cromwell and St. Thomas More, glaring at each other in crisp, unforgettable color. On the facing wall, Bellini’s St. Francis wanders the wilderness between a Titian and a

Tintoretto. Floor-to-ceiling windows alternate with brightly painted treasures of Chinese porcelain, and the writing table behind the sofa is by André-Charles Boulle, the pre-eminent cabinetmaker of Versailles-era France.

How does a contemporary artist enter such a formidable scene? For Edmund de Waal, the English ceramist and author of the acclaimed family memoir “The Hare With Amber Eyes,” the answer is, with modesty. His site-specific installation — one of nine in the Frick galleries — is called “sub silentio” (“in silence”). An elegant arrangement of gray porcelain cylinders and bookmark-size sheets of black steel inside five tall, free-standing glass boxes, it sits very comfortably on the Boulle table. At once thoughtful and provisional, it brings out the artistry of the room, like an abstract diagram of the careful weighing and choosing involved both in painting a great portrait and in deciding where to hang it. It is very decidedly not disruptive.

Only as you follow his whole project, “Elective Affinities,” around the museum does Mr. de Waal’s own restrained music begin to ring out. Below Ingres’s dangerously seductive “Comtesse d’Haussonville,” he installs little strips of solid gold leaning against two huddles of white porcelain; in the richly appointed West Gallery, two pairs of overlapping flat-screen-shaped glass boxes (“from darkness to darkness” and “noontime and dawntime”) distill the experience of being overwhelmed by painted imagery into a lucid kind of serenity. *WILL HEINRICH*

Through Nov. 17; 212-288-0700, frick.org.

Read more about the artist and his process

Edmund de Waal and the Strange Alchemy of Porcelain Nov. 25, 2015



A version of this article appears in print on July 19, 2019, Section C, Page 16 of the New York edition with the headline: Endless Summer? Well, How About Endless Art?

WRITE A COMMENT

ART & DESIGN **The New York Times** See Art Shows

ART IN REVIEW

Beat the Heat With These 10 Must-See Art Shows

Find a cool reprieve — and endless stimulation — at these exhibitions in New York City.

The fine arts season may be winding down, but that doesn't mean the art-going options are drying up. After fanning out across the city, the art critics for The New York Times have 10 first-rate museum exhibitions to recommend, including “Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman” at the New-York Historical Society and “T.C. Cannon: At the Edge of America” at the National Museum of the American Indian. Many of these shows are closing soon, so don't let them pass you by.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Augusta Savage



Augusta Savage with her sculpture “Realization,” from 1938.

Andrew Herman; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations