

26 Art Exhibitions to View in N.Y.C. This Weekend

Sept. 19, 2019

Our guide to new art shows and some that will be closing soon.

‘ARTISTIC LICENSE: SIX TAKES ON THE GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION’ at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (through Jan. 12). Displays that artists select from a museum’s collection are almost inevitably interesting, revealing and valuable. After all, artists can be especially discerning regarding work not their own. Here, six artists — Cai Guo-Qiang, Paul Chan, Richard Prince, Julie Mehretu, Carrie Mae Weens and Jenny Holzer — guided by specific themes, have chosen, which multiplies the impact accordingly. With one per ramp, each selection turns the museum inside out. The combination sustains multiple visits; the concept should be applied regularly. (Roberta Smith)

212-423-3840, guggenheim.org

‘AUSCHWITZ. NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY’ at the Museum of Jewish Heritage (through Jan. 3). Killing as a communal business, made widely lucrative by the Third Reich, permeates this traveling exhibition about the largest German death camp, Auschwitz, whose yawning gatehouse, with its converging rail tracks, has become emblematic of the Holocaust. Well timed, during a worldwide surge of anti-Semitism, the harrowing installation strives, successfully, for fresh relevance. The exhibition illuminates the topography of evil, the deliberate designing of a hell on earth by fanatical racists and compliant architects and provisioners, while also highlighting the strenuous struggle for survival in a place where, as Primo Levi learned, “there is no why.” (Ralph Blumenthal)

646-437-4202, mjhnyc.org

‘PIERRE CARDIN: FUTURE FASHION’ at the Brooklyn Museum (through Jan. 5). He was never a great artist like Dior, Balenciaga or Saint Laurent, but Pierre Cardin — still at work at 97 — pioneered today’s approach to the business of fashion: take a loss on haute couture, then make the real money through ready-to-wear and worldwide licensing deals. He excelled at bold, futuristic day wear: belted unisex jumpsuits, vinyl miniskirts, dresses accessorized with astronaut-chic Plexiglas helmets. Other ensembles, especially the tacky evening gowns souped up with metal armature, are best ignored. All told, Cardin comes across as a relentless optimist about humanity’s future, which has a certain retro charm. Remember the future? (Jason Farago)

718-638-5000, brooklynmuseum.org

‘CYCLING IN THE CITY: A 200-YEAR HISTORY’ at the Museum of the City of New York (through Oct. 6). The complex past, present and future roles of the bicycle as a vehicle for both social progress and strife are explored in this exhibition. With more than 150 objects — including 14 bicycles and vintage cycling apparel — it traces the transformation of cycling’s significance from a form of democratized transportation, which gave women and immigrants a sense of freedom, to a political football that continues to pit the city’s more than 800,000 cyclists against their detractors today. (Julianne McShane)

212-534-1672, mcny.org

‘LEONARDO DA VINCI’S “SAINT JEROME”’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (through Oct. 6). The 500th anniversary of da Vinci’s death in 1519 will bring big doings to Paris this fall with a one-stop-only career survey at the Louvre. New York gets a shot of buzz in advance with the appearance at the Met of a single great painting: “Saint Jerome Praying in the Wilderness.” On loan from the Vatican Museums, it’s one of the most rawly expressive images in the da Vinci canon. And it’s a mystery. We don’t know exactly when it was painted, or for whom, or why. Like much of this artist’s work, it’s unfinished. Incompleteness is part of its power. And powerful this picture is, a spiritual meltdown unfolding right before your eyes. You won’t want to miss it. (Holland Cotter)

212-535-7710, metmuseum.org

‘DRAWING THE CURTAIN: MAURICE SENDAK’S DESIGNS FOR OPERA AND BALLET’ at the Morgan Library & Museum (through Oct. 6). Drawn from Sendak’s bequest to the Morgan of his theatrical drawings, this succinct yet bountiful exhibition offers an overview of a dense, underappreciated period in this artist’s career, undertaken with his most celebrated books well in the past and his life in uneasy transition. “Fifty,” Sendak said, “is a good time to either change careers or have a nervous breakdown.” The new midlife career he took on in the late 1970s was that of a designer for music theater. His rare ability to convey the light in darkness and the darkness in light brought him to opera. It’s the focus of this show, which is aimed at adults but likely delightful for children, too. Five of his productions emerge before our eyes — from rough sketches to storyboards, polished designs and a bit of video footage — in those unmistakably Sendakian colors, watery and vivid at once. (Zachary Woolfe)

212-685-0008, themorgan.org

‘ELECTIVE INFINITIES: EDMUND DE WAAL’ at the Frick Collection (through Nov. 17). How does a contemporary artist enter a scene as formidable as Henry Frick’s Gilded Age mansion? For de Waal, the English ceramist and author of the acclaimed family memoir “The Hare With Amber Eyes,” the answer is with modesty. Only as you follow de Waal’s site-specific installations in nine of the museum’s galleries does his 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)

212-288-0700, frick.org

‘THE JIM HENSON EXHIBITION’ at the Museum of the Moving Image (ongoing). The rainbow connection has been established in Astoria, Queens, where this museum has opened a new permanent wing devoted to the career of America’s great puppeteer, who was born in Mississippi in 1936 and died, too young, in 1990. Henson began presenting the short TV program “Sam and Friends” before he was out of his teens; one of its characters, the soft-faced Kermit, was fashioned from his mother’s old coat and would not mature into a frog for more than a decade. The influence of early variety television, with its succession of skits and songs, runs through “Sesame Street” and “The Muppet Show,” though Henson also spent the late 1960s crafting peace-and-love documentaries and prototyping a psychedelic nightclub. Young visitors will delight in seeing Big Bird, Elmo, Miss Piggy and the Swedish Chef; adults can dig deep into sketches and storyboards and rediscover some old friends. (Farago)

718-784-0077, movingimage.us

‘ILLUSTRATING BATMAN: EIGHTY YEARS OF COMICS AND POP CULTURE’ at the Society of Illustrators (through Oct. 12). Batman turned 80 in April, and now the character is being celebrated with this visual feast of covers and interior pages, teeming with vintage and modern original comic art that shows the hero’s evolution. The exhibition includes “Bat-Manga!: The Secret History of Batman in Japan,” a display devoted to a Batman story originally printed in Japan, and “Batman Collected: Chip Kidd’s Batman Obsession,” featuring memorabilia belonging to the graphic designer Chip Kidd. There will also be a panel discussion on Oct. 3 and a commemoration of Batman Day on Saturday. (George Gene Gustines)

212-838-2560, societyillustrators.org

[Read about the events that our other critics have chosen for the week ahead.]

‘ALICJA KWADE: PARAPIVOT’ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (through Oct. 27). This shrewd and scientifically inclined artist, born in Poland and based in Berlin, has delivered the best edition in five years of the Met’s hit-or-miss rooftop sculpture commission. Two tall armatures of interlocking steel rectangles, the taller of them rising more than 18 feet, support heavy orbs of different-colored marble; some of the balls perch precariously on the steel frames, while others, head-scratchingly, are squinched between them. Walk around these astral abstractions and the frames seem to

become quotation marks for the transformed skyline of Midtown; the marbles might be planets, each just as precarious as the one from which they've been quarried. (Farago)

212-535-7710, metmuseum.org

'SIMONE LEIGH: LOOPHOLE OF RETREAT' at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (through Oct. 27). 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 Leigh the Hugo Boss Prize 2018, but it is the one that inspired this show of three large objects in a gallery off the rotunda. The title comes from the writings of Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman who spent seven years hiding in a crawl space to escape her master's advances. In the exhibition, the "loophole" becomes a kind of artistic conceit, too, in which Leigh moves deftly between mediums, styles and messages, addressing multiple audiences — but always, as she has stated, black women. For 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, these sculptures are sentinels, and placeholders. (Martha Schwendener)

212-423-3840, guggenheim.org

'LIFE: SIX WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS' at the New-York Historical Society (through Oct. 6). In the three-decade-plus golden age of Life magazine, only six of its full-time photographers were women. On the face of it, this exhibition at the historical society is half an excuse to air some gorgeous, previously unpublished silver prints, half a broad hint about how much talent we've lost to discrimination over the years. But cheery photo essays, produced by professional women, about other women hesitating to join the work force make a subtler point: that the actual mechanics of discrimination tend to be more complicated than they appear from a distance. (Heinrich)

212-873-3400, nyhistory.org

'NATURE: COOPER HEWITT MUSEUM DESIGN TRIENNIAL' at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (through Jan. 20). Plastics transformed the material world after World War II. Today, they pollute our oceans. A better future will be made with ... algae. Or bacteria. That's the dominant theme of this sweeping exhibition. On display here at the Smithsonian's temple to the culture of design are objects you might once have expected only at a science museum: Proteins found in silkworms are repurposed as surgical screws and optical lenses. Electronically active bacteria power a light fixture. The triennial displays some 60 projects and products from around the world that define a reconciliation of biosphere and technosphere, as Koert van Mensvoort, a Dutch artist and philosopher, puts it in the show's excellent catalog. "Nature" provides us with a post-consumption future, in which the urgency of restoring ecological function trumps the allure of the latest gadget. (James S. Russell)

212-849-2950, cooperhewitt.org

'NOBODY PROMISED YOU TOMORROW: 50 YEARS AFTER STONEWALL' at the Brooklyn Museum (through Dec. 8). In this large group show, 28 young queer and transgender artists, most born after 1980, carry the buzz of Stonewall resistance into the present. Historical heroes, including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, are honored (in a film by Sasha Wortzel and Tourmaline). Friends in life, Johnson and Rivera are tutelary spirits of an exhibition in which a trans presence, long marginalized by mainstream gay politics, is pronounced in the work of Juliana Huxtable, Hugo Gyrl, Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski and Elle Pérez (who is also in the current Whitney Biennial). (Cotter)

718-638-5000, brooklynmuseum.org

'OCEAN WONDERS: SHARKS!' at the New York Aquarium (ongoing). For years, the aquarium's 14-acre campus hunkered behind a wall, turning its back to the beach. When aquarium officials last year finally got around to completing the long-promised building that houses this shark exhibition, maybe the biggest move, architecturally speaking, was breaking through that wall. The overall effect makes the aquarium more of a visible, welcoming presence along the boardwalk. Inside, "Ocean Wonders" features 115 species sharing 784,000 gallons of water. It stresses timely eco-consciousness, introducing visitors to shark habitats, explaining how critical sharks are to the ocean's food chains and ecologies, debunking myths about the danger sharks pose to people while documenting the threats people pose to sharks via overfishing and pollution. The narrow, snaking layout suggests an underwater landscape carved by water. Past the exit, an outdoor ramp inclines visitors toward the roof of the building, where the Atlantic Ocean suddenly spreads out below. You can see Luna Park in one direction, Brighton Beach in the other. The architectural point becomes clear:

Sharks aren't just movie stars and aquarium attractions. They're also our neighbors — as much a part of Coney Island as the roller coasters and summer dreams. (Michael Kimmelmann)

718-265-3474, nyaquarium.com

'PUNK LUST: RAW PROVOCATION 1971-1985' at the Museum of Sex (through Nov. 30). This show begins with imagery from the Velvet Underground: The 1963 paperback of that title, an exploration of what was then called deviant sexual behavior and gave the band its name, is one of the first objects on display. Working through photos, album art and fliers by artists like Iggy Pop, the New York Dolls, Patti Smith and, yes, the Sex Pistols, the exhibition demonstrates how punk offered a space for sexual expression outside the mainstream. In the story told by "Punk Lust," much of it laid out in placards by the writer and musician Vivien Goldman, one of the show's curators, graphic sexual imagery is a tool for shock that frightens away the straight world and offers comfort to those who remain inside. While some of the power dynamic is typical — underage groupies cavorting with rock stars — images from female, queer and nonbinary artists like Jayne County and the Slits make a strong case for sex as an essential source of punk liberation. (Mark Richardson)

212-689-6337, museumofsex.com

'STONEWALL 50 AT THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY' (through Dec. 1). For its Stonewall summer, the society offers a bouquet of three micro-shows: "Letting Loose and Fighting Back: L.G.B.T.Q. Nightlife Before and After Stonewall," which closes on Sept. 22, is devoted the night life that thrived in places such as the 1950s lesbian bar called the Sea Colony and the gay male sex clubs like the Anvil and the Ramrod that sizzled in the 1970s. "By the Force of Our Presence: Highlights From the Lesbian Herstory Archives" documents the founding in 1974 — by Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, Sahli Cavallero, Pamela Olin and Julia Stanley — of a compendious and still-growing register of lesbian culture. And "Say It Loud, Out and Proud: Fifty Years of Pride" turns a solo spotlight on charismatic individuals: Storme DeLarverie (1920-2014), Mother Flawless Sabrina/Jack Doroshov (1939-2017), Keith Haring (1958-90) and Rollerena Fairy Godmother. (Cotter)

212-873-3400, nyhistory.org

'T. REX: THE ULTIMATE PREDATOR' at the American Museum of Natural History (through Aug. 9). Everyone's favorite 18,000-pound prehistoric killer gets the star treatment in this eye-opening exhibition, which presents the latest scientific research on T. rex and also introduces many other tyrannosaurs, some discovered only this century in China and Mongolia. T. rex evolved mainly during the Cretaceous period to have keen eyes, spindly arms and massive conical teeth, which packed a punch that has never been matched by any other creature; the dinosaur could even swallow whole bones, as affirmed here by a kid-friendly display of fossilized excrement. The show mixes 66-million-year-old teeth with the latest 3-D prints of dino bones, and also presents new models of T. rex as a baby, a juvenile and a full-grown annihilator. Turns out this most savage beast was covered with — believe it! — a soft coat of beige or white feathers.

(Farago)

212-769-5100, amnh.org

'VIOLET HOLDINGS: LGBTQ+ HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE N.Y.U. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS' at Bobst Library (through Dec. 31). With the Stonewall Inn now a National Historic Landmark (and a bar again; it was a bagel shop in the 1980s), nearby New York University has produced a homegrown archival exhibition at Bobst Library, across the park from Grey Art Gallery. Organized by Hugh Ryan, it takes the local history of queer identity back to the 19th century with documents on Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952), an American actor, suffragist and friend of Virginia Woolf, and forward with ephemera related to the musician and drag king Johnny Science (1955-2007) and the African-American D.J. Larry Levan (1954-92), who, in the 1980s, presided, godlike, at a gay disco called the Paradise Garage, which was a short walk from the campus.

(Cotter)

212-998-2500, library.nyu.edu

Last Chance

'APOLLO'S MUSE: THE MOON IN THE AGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (through Sept. 22). This exhibition is a journey through an uncommon history, that of representations of the moon across four centuries. An outsize and beautifully installed revelation of persistent astronomical searches, it is a trailblazing marriage of science and art — 300 images and objects (a telescope, a photograph used as a fire screen, two moon globes, Hasselblad cameras

used by astronauts), plus film excerpts. The images shine a bright light on astronomers' unstoppable pursuit of knowledge as well as on technological advances, artistic responses and fantasy, and also a generous serving of unabashed cuteness. The show amounts to a testament to the human drive to know and explore, and it quietly affirms the growing influence of visual representations of the moon from the invention of the telescope through the Apollo 11 moon landing 50 years ago. (Vicki Goldberg)

212-535-7100, metmuseum.org

'BRAZILIAN MODERN: THE LIVING ART OF ROBERTO BURLE MARX' at the New York Botanical Garden (through Sept. 29). The garden's largest-ever botanical exhibition pays tribute to Brazil's most renowned landscape architect with lush palm trees and vivid plants, along with a display of paintings and tapestries. In the late 1960s and early '70s, Marx (1909-94) planted bright bands of monochrome plants along Rio's Copacabana Beach and the fresh ministries of Brasília, then the new capital. For this show, the garden and its greenhouses synthesize his achievements into a free-form paean rich with Brazilian species, some of which he discovered himself. (*Alcantarea burle-marxii*, one of many thick-fronded bromeliads here, has leaves as tall as a 10-year-old.) Check the weather, make sure it's sunny, then spend all day breathing in this exuberant gust of tropical modernism. (Farago)

718-817-8700, nybg.org

'CULTURE AND THE PEOPLE: EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO, 1969-2019' at El Museo del Barrio (through Sept. 29). This golden anniversary survey of wonderful art from the collection of a treasured East Harlem-based institution sounds a political note from the start, with works by figures who were crucial to the museum's earliest years, like the street photographer Hiram Maristany and the great printmaker Rafael Tufino. Throughout the show, whether in abstract paintings or sculptural installations, art and activism blend. And there's joy: A 2006 collage called "Barrio Boogie Movement" by Rodriguez Calero generates the elation of the sidewalk it depicts, and Freddy Rodriguez's homage to the Dominican catcher Tony Pena — a gold-leaf baseball nestled in a mink-lined glove — is a rush of pure fan love. (Cotter)

212-831-7272, elmuseo.org

'MARTA MINUJÍN: MENESUNDA RELOADED' at New Museum (through Sept. 29). One of the best shows of the summer returns to a legendary moment of midcentury avant-gardism with the vividness of time travel. It replicates with convincing accuracy a funky D.I.Y. multichamber labyrinth created in Buenos Aires in 1965 by the young Argentine artist Marta Minujín, assisted by the artist Ruben Santanonin. The work's title, "La Menesunda," is, appropriately, slang for "a confusing situation," and the immersive combination of happening, performance and installation manifested in cheap, colorful materials makes it so. (Smith)

212-219-1222, newmuseum.org

'PHENOMENAL NATURE: MRINALINI MUKHERJEE' at the Met Breuer (through Sept. 29). You almost forget that art has the power to startle — to make you wonder "How on earth did someone even think to do this, never mind do it?" — until you see a show like this survey of sculptures by Mukherjee (1949-2015), an Indian artist. Roughly half are figurelike forms made from hemp ropes worked in a knotted macramé technique of finger-aching ingenuity and titled with generic names of pre-Hindu nature spirits and fertility deities. Smaller, ceramic pieces, flame shaped and midnight black, suggest Buddhas. Late cast bronze sculptures look both botanical and bestial. The result isn't folk art or design or fiber art or religious art or feminist art. It's modern art of deep originality. And it's an astonishment. (Cotter)

212-731-1635, metmuseum.org

'PLAY IT LOUD: INSTRUMENTS OF ROCK & ROLL' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (through Oct. 1). Presented in collaboration with the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, this exhibition offers a vision of history in which the rock music that flowered in the 1960s and '70s sits firmly at the center. The format of the rock band provides the structure of the show, with one room given over to the rhythm section and another showcasing "Guitar Gods." Yet another room has a display highlighting the guitar's destruction, with pieces of instruments trashed by Kurt Cobain and Pete Townshend. To the extent that it shifts focus toward the tools of the rock trade, the show is illuminating. Of particular interest is the room set aside for "Creating a Sound," which focuses on the sonic possibility of electronics. The lighting in "Play It Loud" is dim, perhaps reflecting rock music as the sound of the night. Each individual instrument shines like a beacon, as if it's catching the glint of an onstage spotlight. It makes the space between audience member and musician seem vast, but that doesn't diminish the wonder of browsing the tools once used by pop royalty. (Richardson)

212-535-7710, metmuseum.org

'2019 WHITNEY BIENNIAL' at the Whitney Museum of American Art (through Sept. 22). Given the political tensions that have sent spasms through the nation over the past two years, you might have expected — hoped — that this year's biennial would be one big, sharp Occupy-style yawp. It isn't. Politics are present but, with a few notable exceptions, murmured, coded, stitched into the weave of fastidiously form-conscious, labor-intensive work. As a result, the exhibition, organized by two young Whitney curators, Rujeko Hockley and Jane Panetta, gives the initial impression of being a well-groomed group show rather than a statement of resistance. But once you start looking closely, the impression changes artist by artist, piece by piece — there's quiet agitation in the air. (Cotter)

212-570-3600, whitney.org