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15 Group Shows Not to Miss

Art Exhibitions From Chelsea to the Lower East Side

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Group shows are a staple of the New York gallery scene, but right now they are not only more plentiful than usual, they are especially good. The 15 group shows reviewed or mentioned here form a welcome antidote to the deluge of monolithic, big-name, single-artist shows that have drawn most of the air in the art world over the last year. They take us to a place where money is not king and give us small snapshots from the gigantic disorderly sprawl that is contemporary art. These shows often represent dealers, their gallery directors or invited curators — usually artists or critics — thinking slightly or very outside the box, putting together disparate works often by younger or lesser-known artists, in new and illuminating combinations. The dizzying bounty here reveals not only the elastic nature of the words “art” and “artist” but also of the group-show format itself.

FAR-FLUNG POINTS OF INTEREST

The current movable feast offers striking contrasts. At the Paul Kasmin Gallery in Chelsea, you can wade into “The New York School, 1969,” a reprise of the groundbreaking exhibition organized in 1969 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Henry Geldzahler, its young, superconnected and first curator of 20th-century art. Radiant with works by the big-name movers and shakers of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Minimalism, this show harks back to a time when art history was seen as altogether more orderly, monolithic and male. (293 10th Avenue, at 27th Street, through March 14)

An equally luminous but quite different display is at Artists Space in TriBeCa: “Welcome to My World: An Anthology of Poems and Artworks by 7th and 8th Grade Students.” It presents the fruits of a program in two New York public middle schools, overseen since its founding by the artist Chrysanne Stathacos, among them sculpture, drawings, paintings, videos and a gorgeous collective quilt, all created by students over the past 13 years. (55 Walker Street, through Feb. 8)

“Vis-à-Vis” at the Andrew Edlin Gallery in Chelsea lands somewhere between the extremes of hyper-blue-chip and inspired amateur. This beguiling selection combines works by outsider artists with disabilities from the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, Calif., and the efforts of those of the insider persuasion. The unpredictable artist Michael Mahalchick has orchestrated the show, bringing together familiar and new names from this increasingly blurred divide: the latest of William Scott’s painterly tributes to black popular culture (through a sci-fi lens) and the pseudo-kitsch “Social Butterfly” ceramic busts by Jeff Schwarz. They are festooned with Andy Warhol fright wigs and seemingly vandalized by graffiti artists. (134 10th Avenue, near 18th Street, through Feb. 28)

A STANDOUT

Forgoing some of the esoteric cliquishness found in its annual surveys of shows from New York museums and

galleries, White Columns, the West Village alternative space, has mustered one of its most ecumenical, visually rewarding overviews in years. “Looking Back: The Ninth White Columns Annual” was assembled by the four members of Cleopatra’s, a Brooklyn-based exhibition space and curatorial collective, and it is a great way to revisit shows you saw and glimpse others you missed. Works by Sigmar Polke, Maria Lassnig, Carrie Mae Weems and Charles Gaines allude to notable museum exhibitions. Certain gallery solo shows are acknowledged, as with Mike Cloud’s “Removed Individual,” a luscious star-shaped painting à la health food game board, and Robert Longo’s bravura charcoal homage to Helen Frankenthaler’s “Mountains and Sea.” Some inclusions look stronger than they did the first time around, including Polly Apfelbaum’s diaphanous dotted abstractions on white silk velvet. Peter Fend, Sam Anderson, Trevor Shimizu, Josh Kline and Greg Parma Smith also help commemorate 2014. (320 West 13th Street, through Feb. 21)

ART’S SPRAWL, IN ONE MEDIUM

“Call and Response” at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise in the West Village is a boisterous affair: The efforts of 59 painters mostly from the United States and Europe hang cheek by jowl in one immense space.

The totality resembles a juried exhibition that still needs some jurying. Walk around, subtracting what you dislike in your mind’s eye, and quite a bit worth considering will remain. Some high points are contributed by Katherine Bernhardt, Sean Landers, Bjarne Melgaard, Kerstin Brätsch, Henry Taylor and Brian Belott. Several artists raise their games strikingly, including Allison Katz, Silke Otto-Knapp, Tala Madani, Caragh Thuring and Ida Ekblad. And unfamiliar names impress, among them mix-masters like Raina Hamner (James Ensor meets Mad magazine) and Jamian Juliano-Villani (graffiti, action figures, Miró) as well as Avery Singer, who takes a more classical turn with a grisaille, geometricized face that looks computer-generated but isn’t. (620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy Street, through Feb. 28)

SEEING THE NEW THROUGH THE OLD

One interesting group-show tactic is to use something by an older, preferably unappreciated artist to frame the work of younger ones. In “The Curve” at Wallspace, in Chelsea, this role is played by the small and exquisite black-and-white still-life photographs of Jan Groover (1943-2012). They bring out both the underlying still-life concerns and the formal purity of abstract paintings by Rebecca Morris and Monique Mouton, ceramic sculptures by Kristen Jensen and Zachary Leener, and Matt Paweski’s complication of Minimalism in painted wood and metal. (619 West 27th Street, through Feb. 14)

At Clifton Benevento in SoHo, the artist Zak Kitnick has organized “The Gentle Way (Judo)” around his love of judo. (In Japanese the written word judo is composed of the characters for “gentle” and “way.”) The older presence here is Roelof Louw, a South African artist who has lived in New York and London. He is represented by a stunning blast from the past: “Soul City (Pyramid of Oranges)” from 1967. Presaging relational aesthetics by some years, it consists of a large, gorgeous pyramid of oranges that are free for the taking, as with Félix González-Torres’s piles of wrapped candy from the early 1990s.

Mr. Louw’s simplicity and prescience and his effortless repurposing of everyday life echo throughout the show. A sculpture by Anicka Yi contemplates human isolation with enlarged versions of cellphone texts cast in slabs of foggy silicone that resemble nothing so much as dense air. Two wall pieces by Charles Harlan consist of found chunks of trees that have grown around bits of razor wire or chain-link fencing — vivid metaphors for accep-

tance. Meanwhile, drawings from 1990 by Edward and Nancy Kienholz dot the walls, announcing their titles and their original prices (“For \$788,” “For \$455”). Nora Mapp, Kyle Thurman, Rochelle Goldberg and Mr. Kitnick himself make equally resonant contributions. (515 Broadway, near Spring Street, through Feb. 14)

GROUP SHOW AS TRIAL BALLOON

Group shows are often a chance for art galleries to expand or redirect their focus. This happens subtly at the Kate Werble Gallery in SoHo. In the well-named show “Quiet Tremors,” the gallery’s somewhat Minimalist aesthetic is maintained, but this is the first time in its six-year history that the gallery has featured paintings. Just as subtly, the show makes a good case for that understated, overtouted abstract painting based on unusual materials or processes. William Latta uses painting and polymer to form dark, bulging surfaces that are muscular and lava-like. Ulrike Müller fashions her small, gleaming geometries from baked enamel on steel. Davide Balula makes textured tondos by alternately soaking in water and drying out factory-primed linen until its white coating starts flaking off. Alison Hall, Kristen Van Deventer and David Schutter further enlarge the gallery’s purview. (83 Vandam Street, near Hudson Street, through Feb. 21)

Similarly, Invisible-Exports, on the Lower East Side, abandons its usual program of envelope-pushers like Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Ron Athey and Kenneth Anger, in this case to tack toward slightly more conventional waters. Or so it seems. “Fetching Blemish,” a selection of eccentric self-portraits by nine artists, is hung salon-style on a single wall with an initially charming effect that soon palls. Strange and unsettling depictions abound. This applies to Dan McCarthy’s ghostly ceramic variations on smiley faces, Amy Sedaris’s ghoulish setup photographs and Rebecca Morgan’s remorselessly detailed self-caricatures, one of which is a painting titled “Self-Portrait at Thirty Living in My Hometown, Post Big Mac Meal.” At the center of all this hangs “Nicoles,” a drawing from the 1990s by Nicole Eisenman, which portrays that artist in multiple, mostly male guises — the still point of this particular storm. (89 Eldridge Street, through Feb. 15)

ARTISTIC DISSONANCE

If there is a group-show look at the moment, it is one of emphatic diversity in which nearly every work on view seems to be in a different, not necessarily identifiable medium. The Lower East Side harbors several worthwhile iterations, including the elegant “Zabriskie Point” at the Jack Hanley Gallery (327 Broome Street), where that 1970 film’s surreal, ultracontemporary sense of displacement prevails. “It Rained Again” at Bureau (178 Norfolk Street, through Feb. 15) is an appealing assortment. “Proper Nouns” at Rachel Uffner (170 Suffolk Street, through Feb. 22), organized by Wyatt Kahn, an artist and the gallery’s director, remains closely focused on the body in different guises. Especially sparse but rewarding variations are “Eraser” at Laurel Gitlen (122 Norfolk Street, through Feb. 15) and “Believe You Me” at 247365 (131 Eldridge Street, through Feb. 15), a hole-in-the-wall arrival from Brooklyn.

The most provocative example of the dissonant group show is “Thanks to Apple, Amazon and the Mall” at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery (54 Ludlow Street, through Feb. 8), which expands our sense of the gallery’s activities by celebrating the line of artists’ e-books it started publishing in 2013. All nine of the writers, artists and filmmakers who created them are represented in this highly diverse presentation. The series has been edited by Brian Droitcour, a freelance critic and an editor at Art in America who also helped organize the show.

The works here include the erotic haiku of the artist duo known as Body by Body, rendered in big black letters on the wall, and the ephemera that Lance Wakeling collected while making his film “Field Visits for Chelsea Man-

ning.” Heightening the show’s none-too-sanguine outlook, these include a Rubik’s Cube produced by the National Security Agency and a brochure about the history of Leavenworth, Kan., home of the federal prison where Ms. Manning, convicted of releasing classified documents on WikiLeaks, currently resides.

Another standout in the show at von Nichtssagend is James Duesing’s “End of Code,” a droll, 15-minute computer animation in which fantastical semihuman creatures deliver deadpan non sequiturs, wisecracks and aphorisms while deciphering the code that controls both traffic lights and society. Whatever the future may bring, it seems to say, it is likely to be disorderly, but it could also be very funny.

Correction: January 29, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the address for the “Welcome to My World” exhibition. It is at Artists Space’s 55 Walker Street location, not the organization’s 38 Greene Street site. The article also misstated the title of the exhibition at the Kate Werble Gallery. It is “Quiet Tremors,” not “Gentle Tremors.” Ulrike Müller’s baked enamel geometries in that show are made on steel, not bronze. And Wyatt Kahn was misidentified as the director of Rachel Uffner Galary; he is the curator of “Proper Nouns.”

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