

# The New York Times

## ART REVIEWS

As Galleries Reopen, Two Critics Find Rewards Eclipse the Angst  
Holland Cotter masks up on the Lower East Side and SoHo; Jillian  
Steinhauer discovers eco-feminist art taking root in Chelsea.



The “Psycho Salon” of the installed John Boskovich rooms, where art meets decor, at David Lewis Gallery. Credit... John Boskovich and David Lewis, New York; Phoebe d’Heurle

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### Holland Cotter

In the New York art world, normal is still a long hike down the pike, but some of the city’s galleries are tiptoeing in that direction with socially distanced reopenings.

Walk in, and you instantly feel what months of virtual visits couldn’t give: the immediate experience of texture, scale and color; the sensual incidents and accidents of light, sound, scent, air; and opportunities for conversation with gallery personnel. What a relief to have all this back.

And at what price? A healthy dose of pandemic angst. On the Covid-19 caution spectrum I land about midway, being neither foolhardy nor phobic. I mask up and, by now, instinctively measure space, as is required by the galleries I visited earlier this week on the Lower East Side and in SoHo. It helped that at each, I happened to be the only drop-in. (My colleague, Jillian Steinhauer, writes below of her own, different experiences in Chelsea.)

For most stops, I’d made an appointment. (Email addresses and telephone numbers, along with summer hours, are on gallery websites; See Saw, the gallery listing service app, is another booking option, though not all galleries use it.) In the case of two street-level spaces that I hadn’t contacted — Shrine on the Lower East Side and Jeffrey Deitch in SoHo — the lights were on, and chance arrivals were welcome.

As for peripheral pleasures, I'm a committed New York City neighborhood walker. An on-foot foray through gallery terrain in any part of town — check out new Black Lives Matter street murals in SoHo — is an integral part of an ambience-rich art trip.

**John Boskovich at David Lewis, 88 Eldridge Street, fifth floor; davidlewisgallery.com.**

Ambience is the essence of a John Boskovich exhibition at David Lewis, my top pick of the Lower East Side shows I saw. This Los Angeles artist, who died at 49 in 2006 and is having his first New York solo in three decades, was a creative polymath whose output is exhausting to think about, never mind sample.

With academic degrees in both art and law, he worked in theater, pop music and film, taught in art schools for years, and made work that incorporated painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, sound and texts. His magnum opus was the home he created in West Hollywood, “a highly fetishized design concept” (his description), entire chunks of which have been reassembled in Lewis's space, through Sept. 27.



John Boskovich “Untitled (Fireplace Screen),” 1997, iron fireplace screen with fireplace tools and vinyl text. Credit...John Boskovich and David Lewis, New York; Phoebe d’Heurle



John Boskovich, “Orgy Cluster Chandelier,” 1997-1998. Bondage masks, metal, internal skeleton, with electric light bulbs and electrical wires. Credit...John Boskovich and David Lewis, New York; Phoebe d’Heurle

One “room,” which the artist referred to as his “Rude Awakening Coffee Nook,” is a mini-photo gallery, densely hung with vintage art photographs (Weegee’s prominent); family portraits and sexy snapshots. A “Millennial Hallway,” its chartreuse walls lined with ceramic bongos in the form of peace signs, leads to a living room (Mr. Boskovich called it the “Psycho Salon”) packed with Christian and Hindu images, lamps made from bondage masks; and relic of a longtime lover lost to AIDS.

And everywhere, there are words — T.S. Eliot, Jean Genet, Joris-Karl Huysmans, 12-step slogans — solemn, funny, in between. Circulating through this purposive material stockpile is the only way to experience an art built entirely on double takes. In that world, it’s hard to tell where spoof stops and spiritual starts, where gags shut down and grief kicks in. When you discover the final, purgatorial phrase of Eliot’s “Four Quartets” — “And the fire and the rose are one” — picked out in small cast iron letters on a faux-baronial fireplace screen, you don’t know whether to laugh or weep.