

Paul Mpagi Sepuya

Through April 13. Team Gallery, 83 Grand Street, Manhattan; 212-279-9219, teamgal.com.

March 28, 2019



Paul Mpagi Sepuya's "Darkroom Mirror" (2017) in his show "The Conditions" at Team Gallery. Paul Mpagi Sepuya, via Team (Gallery, Inc.)

Paul Mpagi Sepuya is experiencing a flush of success right now, and his new show — “The Conditions,” at Team Gallery — demonstrates that it is well deserved. His work appears on the cover of Artforum’s March issue and will be included in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. Mr. Sepuya is not an overnight sensation, however; over a decade of working, exhibiting and returning to art school to study with the great photographer Catherine Opie at the University of California, Los Angeles helped him to arrive at a distinctive and timely amalgam of portraiture and conceptual photography.

Mr. Sepuya’s photographs are like visual puzzles. He appears in many of them, but in fragmented form and usually with a camera in hand. Some of the works show multiple hands holding cameras, suggesting that authorship is always some sort of collaboration. Pushing that out further, you, the viewer are reflected against the dark backdrops in the picture and if you photograph Mr. Sepuya’s works (as I of course did), your hand and camera end up nestled surprisingly amid the gesturing fingers of him and his subjects.

“The Conditions” could refer to lighting, studio setups, or social conditions. Mr. Sepuya’s photographs have often been categorized as “queer” (that is, within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender cosmos), but they feel more universal to me: Multifarious shades of melanin are represented, and he has included images of women in this show. And while the history of representing bodies in photography —particularly nude ones — is fraught, Mr. Sepuya charges intrepidly into the mire, offering what feel like new, smart conclusions on how to represent power or vulnerability, as well as the unwavering desire to look at such images. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

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Christina Forrer

Through April 13. Luhring Augustine, 531 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 212-206-9100, luhringaugustine.com.

Making pictures on a loom, as the Swiss-born, Los Angeles-based artist Christina Forrer does, instead of on canvas or paper, checks a couple of interesting boxes automatically. It invokes the serious feminist art project of reclaiming “women’s work” and at the same time it lampoons the contemporary art world’s infatuation with digital media. A tapestry is a reminder that French artisans mastered pixelation, as well as a kind of analog coding, a good 500 years before the internet.

The way Ms. Forrer does it, flinging loose clusters of marauding, Muppet-like figures across backgrounds of bold color and complex pattern, also tempers the pictures’ importance as pictures. Not that you don’t still look first at the purple girl with enormous green eyes in “Three Awake,” for example. It’s just that the rich patch of indigo you’ll subsequently notice in the piece’s upper left corner is equally significant.

Another way to put it would be to say that Ms. Forrer’s woven sprites and the rich but indistinct worlds they inhabit all seem of a piece, which lends her scenes of giddy mayhem an appropriately dreamlike quality. Some of the nearly 20 characters that inhabit the 10-foot-tall “Untitled (brown background)” issue from others’ mouths, and it’s impossible to tell whether the whole bunch of them are meant to be flying, falling or frozen in place, whether they’re fighting one another to the death or just desperately holding on. *WILL HEINRICH*

BRIC Biennial: Volume III, South Brooklyn Edition

Through April 7. Gallery at BRIC House, 647 Fulton Street, Brooklyn; 718-683-5600, bricartsmedia.org.

In 2014, the arts organization BRIC inaugurated its biennial, an attempt to survey Brooklyn artists by neighborhoods. Flawed though it is, with a focus on geography that can seem arbitrary, the endeavor has proved valuable at spotlighting some of the borough’s abundant creativity.

“BRIC Biennial: Volume III, South Brooklyn Edition,” which features 19 artists and six satellite shows, is a satisfyingly cohesive rumination on dislocation. Katya Grokhovsky focuses on her 93-year-old Jewish grandmother, who survived World War II and immigrated from post-Soviet Ukraine to Australia. She tells

her stories in Ms. Grokhovsky's absorbing video, "The Future Is Bright," (2018) which screens opposite a sculpture whose explosiveness suggests the impossibility of encapsulating a life.

Other artists take a more formal approach. Jordan Nassar collaborates with traditional Palestinian embroiderers on patterned landscapes that delicately entwine his Palestinian and American identities. The sisters Lisa and Janelle Iglesias, a.k.a. Las Hermanas Iglesias, live on different coasts and worked back and forth on the sculpture "Chasing Their Ponytails" (2016-18), which looks like a quirky contraption for decontextualizing everyday items.

In Brooklyn, any exhibition about displacement would be incomplete without confronting harsh realities. Fortunately, Connie Kang and Danielle Wu, two members of An/Other, an arts advocacy group for Asians, have curated "Virtual and Real Estate," a small but mighty show in an adjacent gallery. The centerpiece is Betty Yu's deeply researched inquiry into the gentrification of Sunset Park. Her earnest urgency is counterbalanced by bitingly clever contributions from Daniel Bejar and Pastiche Lumumba, whose "Woke Gentrifyer Starter Pack" (2019) skewers the New Yorker-reading, nonprofit-working, dog-owning liberal. For many Brooklyn art viewers, this may be where the BRIC Biennial hits closest to home.

JILLIAN STEINHAUER