

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



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By **Roberta Smith**, **Martha Schwendener**, **Will Heinrich** and **Jillian Steinhauer**

April 18, 2018

Joe Overstreet

Through May 5. Eric Firestone Gallery, 4 Great Jones Street, Suite 4, Manhattan; 917-324-3386, ericfirestonegallery.com.

The history of postwar American abstract painting remains a work in progress. We are barely beginning to understand its sheer multiplicity in terms of the artists' races and cultures and the works' physical character. New information arrives in regular and humbling batches.

The latest is [Joe Overstreet](#)'s stunning exhibition "[Innovation of Flight, Paintings 1967-1972](#)" at Eric Firestone. With 20 rarely seen works, it covers a brief period when Mr. Overstreet's disavowal of painting's usual standards and practices was unfolding rapidly in several directions, alongside efforts by Sam Gilliam, Harmony Hammond, Alan Shields and Howardena Pindell, among others.

Of central importance was Mr. Overstreet's jettisoning of traditional stretcher bars, anchoring his work — to walls, ceilings, floors or a mix thereof — with thin rope, metal eyes and handsome knots. As the show's subtitle suggests, evoking lightness and levitation was clearly a goal; some paintings here seem ready for takeoff. Another goal: giving equal prominence to how he painted and what he painted on. Sources and inspirations seem to include Jackson Pollock, Jules Olitski, African textiles, American Indian symbols and things nautical.

All together, the pieces deviate wildly in technique, combining stain, hard-edge and shaped painting. Stretched taut, carefully draped or seemingly suspended, these structures evoke tents, gliders, banners and even spaceships and maps. But these suggestions are all tempered by Mr. Overstreet's brilliant use of color and process, and by beauty.

An early example that uses stretchers is "North Star" (1968), whose crackling bands of color involve both hard-edge and stain painting and whose rectangular shape is transgressed by numerous notches, as well as by two cutout squares, so that it resembles a large mask. "For Happiness" (1970) also combines multiple painting techniques; it has 13 ropes that jauntily tilt its surface back and forth in space, challenging understanding of the piece as a whole.

In contrast to this complexity, "Hoo Doo Mandala" and "Mandala" (both 1970) are relatively square and frontal, but also gently billowed and scalloped by their anchoring ropes. Their radiant, asymmetrical geometries are reminiscent of everything from semaphore and hot-air balloons to tantric painting and the early Modernist works of the married artists [Sonia Delaunay and Robert Delaunay](#).

In several works from 1972, Mr. Overstreet switches to an explosive, staccato drip technique, whose intimations of starry skies are regularly contradicted by dividing lines or added segments of canvas, leaving us suspended between deep space and eccentric objects. I look forward to seeing these exuberant, groundbreaking creations becoming standard in museums and new art histories. ROBERTA SMITH

Jared Bark

Through May 12. Yancey Richardson, 525 West 22nd Street, Manhattan; 646-230-9610, yanceyrichardson.com.

The ready-made, an industrially manufactured object repurposed as art, was popular in the 20th century. But could there be such a thing as ready-made photography? [Jared Bark](#) could be said to have found it in his “[Photobooth Pieces](#)” at [Yancey Richardson](#). Mostly created between 1972 and 1975, these arrangements turn the strips of four photographs that were made in booth machines into artful grids.

Mr. Bark made his first work of this sort in Times Square in 1969. After that, he traveled around the country, asking people at Woolworth’s drugstores to step inside the machines and pose. (He also acquired his own booth in 1972.) The resulting portrait grids, with their serial repetition of images, contain elements of Minimalism and Pop Art, as well as of the filmic realism of ’70s auteur directors like Robert Altman.

The range of humanity on display here is also impressive — particularly when compared with that of similar projects, like Andy Warhol’s photo booth works — as people of all ages and ethnicities appear in photos taken in, for instance, Phoenix or Provo, Utah.

In addition to inviting strangers to participate in his work, Mr. Bark often stepped inside the booth himself. Those results are more experimental, composed into abstract diamonds or squares, and with body parts photographed in rapid-fire succession, or a light bulb dangling alone in space.

A feeling of nostalgia and obsolescence pervades these pieces. Photo booths are nearly relics, now that almost everyone's phone has a camera. But Mr. Bark's works are like an ancestor of the selfie or the images on social media, with an endless view of photographed humanity scrolling by. MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Zoe Pettijohn Schade

Through May 6. Kai Matsumiya, 153½ Stanton Street, Manhattan; 617-678-4440, kaimatsumiya.com.

It took [Zoe Pettijohn Schade](#) as long as a year and a half to make each of the intricate large gouaches in “[Shifting Sets](#),” a show lining the walls of Kai Matsumiya’s tidy Stanton Street gallery. Weirdly timeless meditations on death, they simultaneously evoke cutting-edge Photoshop effects and rococo wallpaper, with tiled and overlapping imagery that includes skulls from the Parisian catacombs; toy army men in marbled silhouette; and delicate, color-graded pigeon feathers modeled on one blackening example the artist found in her garden.

What’s most fascinating, though, isn’t the pieces’ nominal content so much as the seeming evanescence of the labor that went into them: If you lean in close, you can see every semi-opaque brush stroke in every pale gray feather, but from any greater distance, such small evidences of the artist’s time and attention disappear in the overall dazzle.

The same kind of visual dynamic flickers across the whole of “Crowd of Crowds: 100th Monkey” (2017), which is covered in diagonal rows of grimacing, long-tailed primates. Because some of them are ghostly gray, and others mere silhouettes filled in with more feathers, skulls, or tombstones, it can take minutes of staring to notice just how simple the pattern is. WILL HEINRICH

'Clay Today'

Through May 6. *The Hole*, 312 Bowery, Manhattan; 212-466-1100,
theholenyc.com.



Francesca DiMattio's "Boucherouite IV," part of the "Clay Today" show at the Hole. The Hole Gallery, New York

Contemporary art has been experiencing a ceramics renaissance for several years now, though its full breadth remains underexplored by galleries and museums. [“Clay Today,”](#) a new exhibition at the Hole, provides a welcome, if not rigorous, introduction to the utterly creative and clever ways that artists are using this material.

The exhibition opens with a showstopper near the entrance: Francesca DiMattio’s [“Boucherouite IV”](#) (2017), a blue-and-white human-size figure of sorts, whose body is a technical marvel of zigzagging rows of clay fringe. Bulging with appendages, “Boucherouite” incorporates items like a flowered porcelain handle and a Delftware vessel. Traditional ceramics have not been completely abandoned, but rather overtaken by experimentation. This feeling is echoed in Trevor Baird’s vases adorned with panels of comics, and in Rebecca Morgan’s gorgeously goofy face jugs. Allison Schulnik’s [“Rutile Pink Unicorn Vessel”](#) (2017) is a simple, oversize urn whose surface is teeming with miniature versions of the title creature.

In other places, clay looks a lot like something else, as in Diana Rojas's riff on a retail display of shoes. The most compelling of such works hang on the wall: Valerie Hegarty, Thomas Mailaender and Jesse Edwards have turned ceramics into imitations of paintings, photographs and TV sets, with the objects getting flatter as the illusionistic space deepens.

In the show's most exciting art, firm reference points slip away. Two pieces by Shinichi Sawada recall the ritual objects of a lost society. Heidi Lau's "Seventh and Eighth Level of Hell" (2018) evokes an alien, ominous world that incorporates elements of our own. And Roxanne Jackson's "Wild Mineral" (2017) suggests the sawed-in-half skull of a dangerous, mythical creature. These works, grouped along one wall, demonstrate what can happen when clay becomes a vessel for pure imagination. **JILLIAN STEINHAUER**

A version of this article appears in print on April 20, 2018, Section C, Page 17 of the New York edition with the headline: Galleries. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

