

10 Under-the-Radar Art Shows to See Now

Our critics select museum and gallery exhibitions that provide a respite from carols and crowds.

Nov. 22, 2018

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

‘Rochelle Feinstein: Image of an Image’

In her career survey, “Image of an Image,” Rochelle Feinstein, a Bronx native, proves that she can do just about anything with painting. She can chronicle history or tell a joke. She can alchemize linen, photographs, newspapers, cardboard and photocopies into art. She can teach you something about looking and life. (Until recently, Ms. Feinstein was a professor of painting at Yale.)

This artist, a whiz with color, is a wisecracking New Yorker. She sprays and squeezes paint, and stains with it. Several works feel like odes to color charts or to the color theory art students learn in school. Her jokes are dark and wry. A black-and-white painting with big, chunky letters advertises “The Estate of Rochelle F” (2009-10), a reminder of how artists (and particularly women) are often recognized only posthumously.



A morbid strain runs through some of the works as Ms. Feinstein grapples with and battles the forces trying to shut down painting in favor of other media. "El Bronco" (1994) features a stark white tire print careening vertically down a black canvas, nodding to Barnett Newman's color-field "zip" paintings and Robert Rauschenberg's 1953 horizontal tire mark on paper — but also to O.J. Simpson's Ford Bronco and the murders and criminal trial that polarized this country around racial lines in the mid-1990s.

"Love Vibe" (1999-2014) is a daisy-chain mural of six bright green- and-white paintings with janky black text that reads, "love your work" — except that the words appear in reverse, as if seen in a rear-view mirror. It is a reference to the way artists casually — perhaps insincerely — compliment one another's efforts. It also feels like a love letter to painting and perhaps even to the viewer since, who knows? Maybe Ms. Feinstein loves our work — looking at, contemplating, writing about her paintings — as much as we love hers. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

Through March 3. 1040 Grand Concourse, the Bronx; 718-681-6000, bronxmuseum.org.

The Culture Calendar Aug. 29, 2018



THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

'Pontormo: Miraculous Encounters'



Jacopo da Pontormo's "Visitation" (1528-30), which shows the Virgin Mary greeting her aged cousin Elizabeth, is at the heart of "Pontormo: Miraculous Encounters," a show at the Morgan Library & Museum. Pieve dei Santi Michele e Francesco, Carmignano

The smallest of the fall's great museum exhibitions centers on a single Mannerist masterpiece: Jacopo da Pontormo's stunning "Visitation" (1528-30), which depicts the meeting of the Virgin Mary and her aged cousin Elizabeth. Both are pregnant (Elizabeth with John the Baptist); each is accompanied by a female attendant. It was executed for a noble family in Carmignano, Italy, where it hangs above the altarpiece in the parish church. The Morgan has installed the painting similarly, in the chapel-size Clare Eddy Thaw Gallery. I recommend sitting on the bench provided and gazing upward, as if from the first pew.

"Visitation" is a knockout, over nine feet high. The four women are larger than life, dwarfing two tiny men who are visible in the panel's lower left corner, wearing white masks and lounging in front of a building. The work evinces Pontormo's characteristic fineness of gesture and expression, most of all in the meeting eyes and beautiful, gentle hands of Mary and Elizabeth. Also characteristically, the figures float more than stand, their serenity contrasting with the swirling of their garments, which reflect the artist's innovative penchant for sharp hues and pungent pairings.

Received by recent conservation, Pontormo's colors seem deliberately provocative, even today; they're as much characters as the women, especially Elizabeth's mint green dress and orange robe, and the hot pink over olive green worn by Mary's attendant. Mary wears a light pink gown mostly covered by her traditionally blue robe, which here has a touch of topaz. **ROBERTA SMITH**

Through Jan. 6. 225 Madison Avenue; 212-685-0008, themorgan.org.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
'Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean'



"Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroines," one of the wry assemblages in the show "Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean," at the New-York Historical Society.
Betye Saar and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles; Robert Wedemeyer

Betye Saar, now 92, has been making important and influential work for nearly 60 years. Yet no big New York museum has given her a full retrospective, or even a significant one-person show, since a 1975 solo at the Whitney Museum of American Art. As the New-York Historical Society's exhibition "Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean" demonstrates, the institutional oversight is especially baffling, as her primary themes — racial justice and feminism — are exactly attuned to the present moment and, indeed, to every American moment within memory.

Ms. Saar grew up in the Watts section of Los Angeles, watching the immigrant Italian artist Simon Rodia construct his fabulous towers from scrap materials. An encounter with Joseph Cornell's art in the early 1960s convinced her that assemblage could be intimately scaled and politically pointed. By then, she was already involved in the Black Arts and women's movements. Her 1972 breakthrough piece, "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima," merges the two by transforming the racist stereotype of the smiling black mammy into an armed freedom fighter.

In the show at the New-York Historical Society, which comes from the Craft & Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, the same figure appears, though the main transformed element is different: the old-fashioned wooden washboard, once a domestic staple and now an antique artifact. Generations of women, among them servants, used it to keep things clean, though without being able to erase the stains of racism and sexism from their lives. But in the present of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, the struggle to do so goes on. "Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroines" is the title of a work in the show. Someone should alert the major art museum on the opposite side of Central Park that there's one such heroine here. *HOLLAND COTTER*

Through May 27. 170 Central Park West; 212-873-3400, nyhistory.org.

FRICK COLLECTION

'The Charterhouse of Bruges'



"Virgin and Child With St. Barbara, St. Elizabeth and Jan Vos," a painting by Jan van Eyck and his workshop, in the show "The Charterhouse of Bruges," at the Frick Collection. The Frick Collection, New York

ART & DESIGN | The Under-the-Radar Art Shows to See Now

A cultivated show on the religious functions of early Netherlandish art, “The Charterhouse of Bruges” has been mounted in a gallery no larger than a coat closet — though a more apt comparison may be to a monk’s cell.

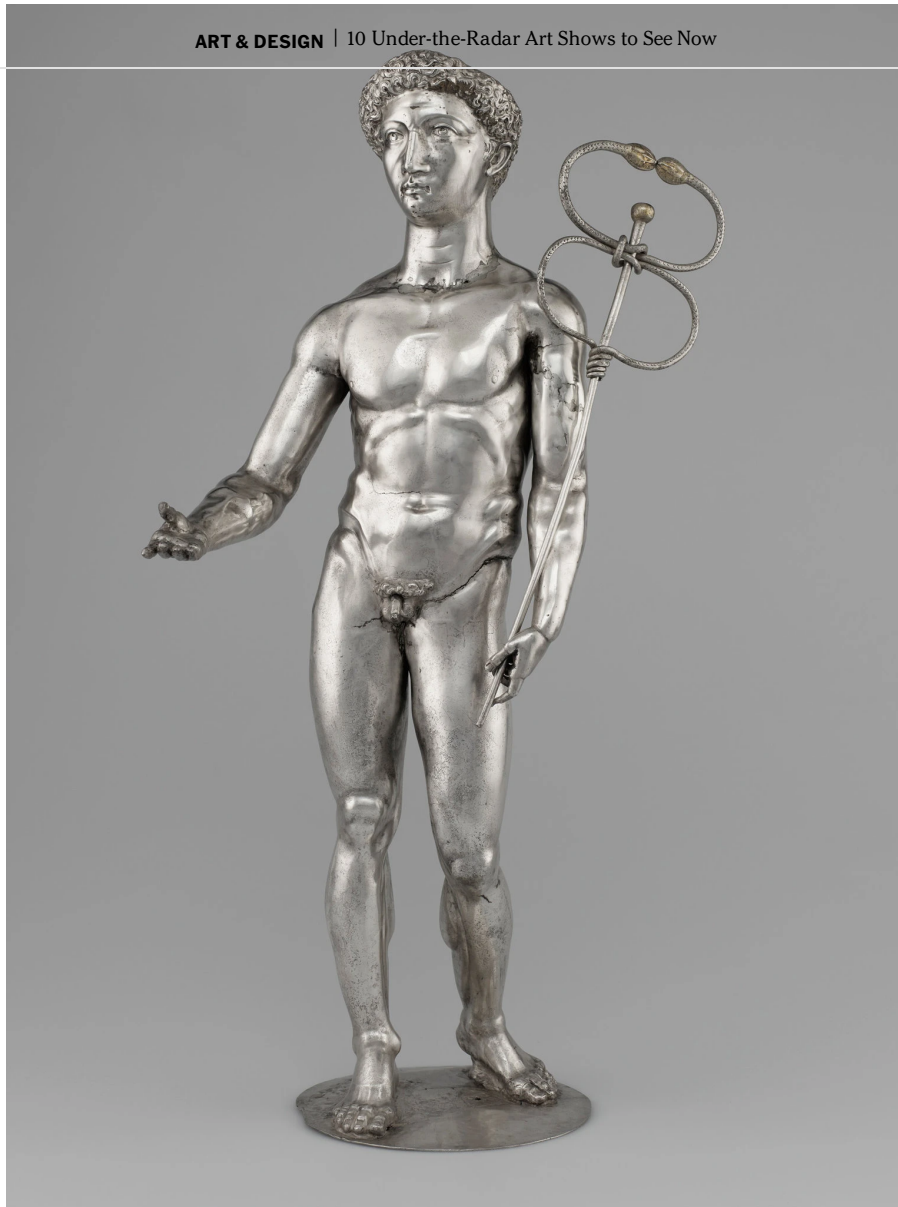
Bruges, which now attracts tourists with a taste for canal cruises and Belgian chocolate, was in the 1440s among Europe’s most dynamic cities for art and commerce. It was also home to a strict Carthusian order, devoted to silence, whose leader, Jan Vos, commissioned paintings by two of Bruges’s best artists for the order’s charterhouse, or monastery. They are reunited here: the Frick’s own gem-hard “Virgin and Child with St. Barbara, St. Elizabeth and Jan Vos,” probably begun by Jan van Eyck and finished by his workshop after his death, and another picture of the Virgin and the monk by Petrus Christus, lent by the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. In both we see Vos in a smoke-colored hooded robe, kneeling before Mary, his hair severely tonsured.

A lover of Netherlandish painting could spend days contrasting these two Flemish artists’ handling of tempera, their detailed cityscapes, their care for Mary’s ringlets or Vos’s cloak. But the brilliance of this show, organized by the young curator Emma Capron, is that it looks beyond form to matters of use. The larger Van Eyck was for public devotion — viewers who said the “Ave Maria” before it would get 40 days deducted from their time in purgatory — while the Petrus Christus, no bigger than a sheet of loose leaf, could be clasped or even kissed during prayer. And other objects here, including a tiny, hinged wooden prayer bead that opens to reveal a minutely carved devotional scene, extend our view of European religious art beyond painting. These works were meant for so much more than just our gaze. *JASON FARAGO*

Through Jan. 13. 1 East 70th Street, Manhattan; 212-288-0700, frick.org.

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

‘Devotion and Decadence’



This Roman silver statuette of the god Mercury, capturing the everyday elegance of a lost world, is one of the highlights of “Devotion and Decadence,” at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; Tahnee Cracchiola/Getty-Bibliothèque Nationale de France

In 1830, a Norman farmer working a new piece of land near the village of Berthouville plowed up 50 pounds of ancient Roman silver. The hoard, which was eventually acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, came to be known as the “Berthouville Treasure.” Having been buried on the grounds of a temple to Mercury, it included a statuette of the god, which, at nearly two feet tall, is one of the largest such pieces to survive from antiquity.

It is among dozens of works now on display in “Devotion and Decadence: The Berthouville Treasure and Roman Luxury From the Bibliothèque Nationale de France,” highlighting the achievements of ancient silversmiths.

Bright and gleaming in a climate-controlled vitrine after a yearslong conservation at the Getty, naked except for his emblematic staff entwined with snakes, the figure bears a curious resemblance to Michelangelo’s “David”: His tousled head is slightly oversize, and his muscular frame stands in a subtle contrapposto. But while he cuts an elegant silhouette and is an astonishing example of metalwork, what’s really remarkable about him is how ordinary

books: Along with erotically themed drinking bowls, hammered platters decorated with elaborate mythical scenes, and a pile of broken-off silver cup handles, the statuette evokes a lost world of luxury in which even provincial households were well stocked with extravagant objets d'art.

Another Mercury figure, which survived in fragments, was reassembled in the 19th century with beeswax. The wax may have originally been tinted to blend in with the silver, but time has darkened it, so the figure is now at once a window into ancient wealth and 19th-century museum practice. *WILL HEINRICH*

Through Jan. 6. 15 East 84th Street, Manhattan; 212-992-7800, isaw.nyu.edu.

GREY ART GALLERY, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

'NeoRealismo: The New Image in Italy, 1932-1960'



"The Italians Turn Around Milan," a 1954 photograph by Mario De Biasi, is among the works in "NeoRealismo," at the Grey Art Gallery. Archivio Mario De Biasi

The artworks most associated with Italian neorealism are heart-wrenching movies that dramatize the hardships of postwar life. This exhibition makes the case for an Italian neorealist photography movement that may not have produced masterpieces at the same rate, but was more wide-ranging and less stark than its filmic counterpart.

Consisting of 174 pictures by 73 photographers, along with film clips, books and newsmagazines, "NeoRealismo" begins with Fascism. Mussolini's ersatz populism and propagandistic imagery set the stage for the decades after the war, when the romanticization of everyday Italians who were striving to build up their lives and nation became increasingly expansive. Franco Pinna's 1952 photograph of a woman said to be the town witch, who's pictured reverently, like a saint, and Chiara Samugheo's arresting 1955 series of women who are described as possessed demonstrate an embrace of the country in all its idiosyncrasies.



Many of these images vividly capture public life in Italy in the postwar years, like “Apulia Apulia,” taken by Gianni Berengo Gardin in 1958. Gianni Berengo Gardin

People are the beating heart of “NeoRealismo.” They’re shown close up, in portraits charged with intimacy, and far away, dwarfed by hostile environments. We see them in the streets or performing physical labor, rarely in their homes. Neorealism was interested in private life only insofar as it related to a public, collective one — a tenet summed up by Mario Ingrassia’s 1952 photographs of an outdoor wedding procession. (In one, the bride crosses a stream while someone holds the bottom of her dress.)

In this regard, the movement was unquestionably a political project. Yet the strongest images still adhere to artistic concerns, like Nino Migliori’s “People of Emilia. Summer’s Evening” (1953), with its rich shadows and quiet composition. In some cases, the photographers even let in a potent bit of ambiguity. A pitch-perfect 1960 picture by Gianni Berengo Gardin captures a well-dressed couple riding a scooter past a building on whose facade is printed a fading Fascist slogan: “Noi siamo contro la vita comoda,” or, “We’re against the comfortable life.” *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

Through Dec. 8. 100 Washington Square East, Manhattan; 212-998-6780, greyartgallery.nyu.edu.

COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM

‘Saturated: The Allure and Science of Color’



An installation view of “Saturated: The Allure and Science of Color,” a show of almost 200 pieces at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.
 Matt Flynn/Smithsonian Institution

This museum excels at exhibitions that brim with somewhat arcane information embodied by visually dazzling objects, and few subjects qualify for that approach like color. This show is all the more impressive because the nearly 200 items on view, which range through centuries, have been drawn almost entirely from the Cooper Hewitt’s vast holdings.

They are supplemented by around 40 illustrated books from the Smithsonian Libraries, including a rare copy of “The Great Art of Light and Shadow,” of 1671, in which Athanasius Kircher diagramed the basics of the color spectrum (minus violet) for the first time, and J.C. Le Blon’s groundbreaking “Coloritto, or, The Harmony of Colouring in Painting,” of 1725, which laid the foundation for color printing. But the uses of color in real life is the main story here, demonstrated primarily by one small, ravishing grouping after another.

There are connections to be made, like one between a carved lacquer covered box from 18th-century China and a tall green urn in 3-D printed nylon. And there are encompassing experiences to be had, including an alcove whose walls are covered in “Scenic Wallpaper” (also digital), designed in 2017 by Carnovsky. The presentation seems to require 3-D glasses but pops into focus once you step inside. Theory and practice frequently come together with unusual clarity. One example is the 2012 cotton blanket from the Index Collection that fabulously illustrates the tonal gradations of color printing — monotone, duotone and multitone — from pale to intense. Think ombre.

ROBERTA SMITH

Through Jan. 13. 2 East 91st Street, Manhattan; 212-849-8400, cooperhewitt.org.

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
 ‘Paa Joe: Gates of No Return’



Paa Joe's "Cape Coast Castle," one of 13 hardwood models of former Gold Coast slave forts in the exhibition "Gates of No Return," at the American Folk Art Museum. Paa Joe and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; via American Folk Art Museum

Joseph Tetteh Ashong, better known as Paa Joe, makes coffins. After serving a long apprenticeship with his cousin Kane Kwei, who is credited with popularizing the use of figurative wooden coffins in Ghana in the 1950s, Paa Joe became the country's pre-eminent funerary carpenter, turning out thousands of brightly colored lions, soda bottles, and automobiles for people to be buried in. Most of his exuberant pieces enjoy the light of day for only a few hours before they disappear into the ground. But in 2004, Paa Joe was commissioned by the art dealer and gallerist Claude Simard to make casket-size hardwood models of 13 former Gold Coast slave forts.

The seven of these that are now on display at the American Folk Art Museum don't look like monuments to human misery. For one thing, they're all freshly painted and immaculate, unlike the originals. Paa Joe also has a cartoonist's gift for transmuting even the most complex and brutal material into a cheerful expression of his own artistic temperament. Architecture is compressed and abbreviated, and a pattern meant to suggest mixed stonework looks more like flying rashers of bacon. That's not to say that the complexity is elided: Each model carries the names and dates of all its European occupiers ("1653 Sweden 1665 Britain") as well as an unobtrusive door labeled "Gate of No Return," and the subtext of a contemporary African meditation on the slave trade is as heavy as can be. It's just that the work's conceptual weight doesn't hamper its overwhelming visual pleasure. *WILL HEINRICH*

Through Feb. 24. 2 Lincoln Square, Manhattan; 212-595-9533, folkartmuseum.org.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

'R.H. Quaytman: +x, Chapter 34'



R.H. Quaytman's "+ x, Chapter 34," a work of oil, acrylic, snakeskin and gesso on wood, part of the show of her work at the Guggenheim Museum R. H. Quaytman

As you summit the Guggenheim's spiraling rotunda, it is as if the exhibition of the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) had suddenly exploded into 28 fragments, scattering small abstract paintings across the walls. This is R.H. Quaytman's "+ x, Chapter 34," a series of works made in 2018 in response to af Klint's oeuvre from the last century.

Ms. Quaytman is the perfect artist to answer af Klint. One of the leading lights of contemporary post-Conceptual painting, she also organized a show of af Klint's work at MoMA PS1 in 1989. Af Klint worked in series, and Ms. Quaytman works in what she calls "chapters." And where af Klint took orders from spirits she claimed to have contacted through séances and other occult techniques, Ms. Quaytman, for this project, has adopted af Klint as her higher power, working in a more secular, channeled collaborative vein.



An installation view of the show in the Guggenheim's rotunda. The exhibition's works were created in response to the art of Hilma af Klint.
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; David Heald

Each bay in the Guggenheim's upper spiral features a painting with a white circle in a deep indigo square. These feel like portals, abstracted suns or visionary eyes, but they also echo af Klint's "SUW/UW Series" (1914-15), in which, drawing from theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, she treated painting as a vehicle for merging religions and philosophical systems. In a nearby wall text, Ms. Quaytman comments on how af Klint, working like a "mad scientist," was able to join both rational and intuitive faculties to conjure invisible, metaphysical ideas.

In other muted, post-Minimalist panels, Ms. Quaytman borrows af Klint's symbolic vocabulary, including the handwritten "+" and "x" on the first page of af Klint's notebooks. Thoughtful and methodical, "x +, Chapter 34" is a quiet show, a perfect coda to af Klint. Where that Swedish artist offers a bright, dynamic symphony, Ms. Quaytman responds with a spare, restrained and slightly dissonant tone poem. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

Through April 23. 1071 Fifth Avenue; 212-423-3575, guggenheim.org.

COOPER UNION, 41 COOPER GALLERY

'We Dissent ... Design of the Women's Movement in New York'



An installation view of “We Dissent ... Design of the Women’s Movement in New York,” at Cooper Union. It includes, at far right, two 1971 posters by Faith Ringgold: “America Free Angela,” left, and “Freedom Woman Now.”

Faith Ringgold, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Haisi Hu

This presentation is less an exhibition than a walk-in archive and reading room and, in that, it is intimate and inspiring. In posters, magazines, books and videos, it provides a historical overview of the printed matter that was designed by women over the past century or so to pursue the liberties long accorded to men.

Its ferment begins with an application for admission to the New York School of Design for Women, which was part of the Cooper Institute, as Cooper Union was initially called. That is followed by an enlargement of a handbill inviting women to the “First Feminist Mass Meeting” at Cooper in 1914. That rally was organized by the Heterodoxy Club of New York, founded in 1912 and lasting into the 1940s. In between, the show documents the influence of Marxism and the combined agitation for women’s and civil rights.

Discoveries include the marvelous woodcuts of Lucia Vernarelli, a member of the Redstockings; Faith Ringgold’s 1971 poster in support of Angela Davis, “America Free Angela”; and newsletters from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, including one memorializing Audre Lorde (1934-1992).

The show ends with a big, bold new banner by the Guerrilla Girls, whose handsome, emphatically designed posters have pelted the art world with dismaying facts about the demographics of gallery rosters and museum collections for over four decades. But the beating heart of the display may be several long tables’ worth of feminist literature that feature such classics as Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Second Sex,” and recent additions like the impressively thick “Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader,” edited by Penny A. Weiss and published this year by the New York University Press. Thrillingly, all the books are available for browsing and reading. **ROBERTA SMITH**

Through Dec. 2. 41 Cooper Square, Manhattan; cooper.edu.

‘Hilma Who?’ No More Oct. 11, 2018





Is Sarah Lucas Right for the #MeToo Moment? Oct. 16, 2018



Correction: November 30, 2018

A photograph of a painting with an earlier version of this article was published in error. The picture showed an outdated version of " + x, Chapter 34," a work by the artist R.H. Quaytman, and was erroneously included in a set of images provided by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

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