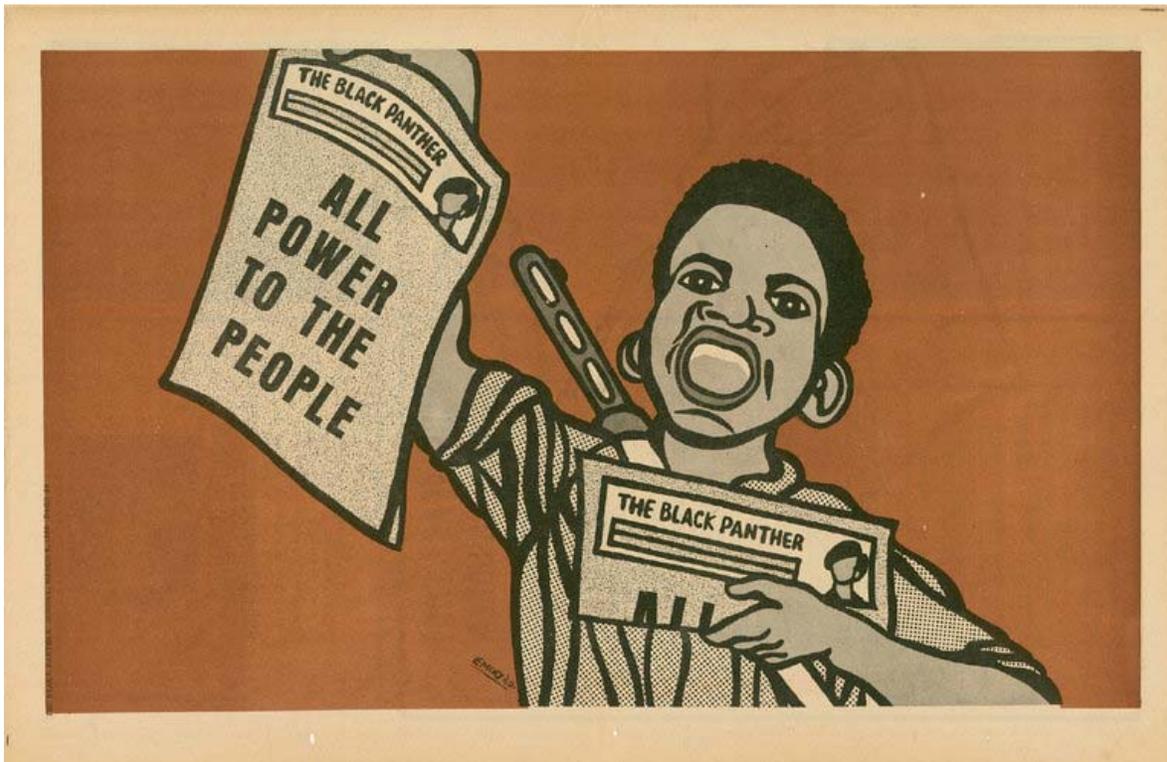


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ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER and WILL HEINRICH NOV. 10, 2016



The Black Panther Party newspaper, March 9, 1969, in “Black Pulp!” at the International Print Center New York. 2016 Emory Douglas Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University

‘Black Pulp!’

*International Print Center New York
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 3*

Corrosive racial stereotypes have always been rife in American culture, but a counterculture of corrective images has existed too. That’s the subject of this rich historical show of work in various print media. The

curators, William Villalongo and Mark Thomas Gibson, both artists, take the story back to the early 20th century with two book jacket designs by Aaron Douglas. One is an abstract, upsurging, rocket-like pattern for Alain LeRoy Locke's "The New Negro" (1925); the other, a sinuous Deco-Nubian tableau for "Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists" (1926). Both in content and design, they sum up the show's view of the "black experience" as uncategorizably diverse.

The historical images that follow support this take. They include an effervescent 1930s Esquire spread by E. Simms Campbell illustrating African-American dance styles; Black Panther Party broadsides from the late 1960s; 1990s comic books featuring the black superhero Static. This material, much of it on loan from the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University, is supplemented by LP album covers (Sun Ra, Kurtis Blow) and Chester Himes paperbacks, along with work by some two dozen contemporary artists working within, or with reference to, a pop-culture groove. Kerry James Marshall is here in his formally brilliant "Rythm Mastr" cartoon series, as are several younger artists — Firelei Báez, William Downs, Lucia Hierro, Kenny Rivero, Alexandria Smith — now coming into their own.

The show, which originated at the Yale School of Art, has a keeper of a free gallery guide, and a catalog with solid essays by the curators as well as by Tomashi Jackson, an artist with a solo at Tilton Gallery on the Upper East Side through Dec. 23, and Robert Storr. Their words are an integral part of a superlative visual package.

HOLLAND COTTER



“But on the seventh day a bit of peace and quiet...,” by Werner Büttner, at Marlborough Chelsea. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough Chelsea

Werner Büttner

‘Poor Souls’

*Marlborough Chelsea
545 West 25th Street
Through Dec. 3*

Postwar Germany has never lacked interesting artists. One of them, Werner Büttner, arrived in New York in 1983, showing at Metro Pictures with his compatriots Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen and Markus

Oehlen; their ham-handed, irreverent canvases skewered painting and German Neo-Expressionism. After a solo show at Metro in 1986, Mr. Büttner all but disappeared from New York.

Now he is back with his second gallery solo, "[Poor Souls](#)," at [Marlborough Chelsea](#). It reveals an artist who seems slightly bored with his own shtick and is taking shortcuts to underscore painting's commodity status. Closely spaced and nearly all the same size, the 17 works here seem to come off a production line. Combining supposedly found images of figures against solid backgrounds, they have an arbitrary, Surrealist air. Colors are mostly tamped down; brushy but rotelike surfaces vary little. A need to avoid seduction and to look tough dominates. German clichés, like sausages and Dachshunds and a swastika, make appearances.

The mechanical, filled-in nature of these works is clarified with a display of collages on which some of the paintings here are closely based. They feature figures cut from magazines and set against more images or solid painted grounds. The best paintings might look stronger if seen without the others. As it is, you can decide if the show makes — yet again — a useful point about paintings being calculatedly churned out for the market or if Mr. Büttner has simply decided to take the easy way out.

ROBERTA SMITH



Plaster figures in GCC's "Positive Pathways (+)" at Mitchell-Innes & Nash. Courtesy of the artists and Mitchell-Innes & Nash

GCC

'Positive Pathways (+)'

Mitchell-Innes & Nash
534 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Nov. 23

GCC is a collective of [eight young Arab artists](#) — their name refers to an intergovernmental body called the Gulf Cooperative Council — and their work in ["Positive Pathways \(+\)" at Mitchell-Innes & Nash](#) was inspired by the growing popularity, in the Gulf states, of Western-style New Age healing systems. A hypnotically confident self-help voice-over plays in the gallery, and a nearly life-size plaster figure of a woman wearing a head scarf bends over a figure of a boy. We learn from the publicity release that she's practicing Quantum Touch therapy, a reiki-like practice that uses the body's life-force energy to promote wellness.

Otherwise the work consists of five shallow plastic friezes hanging on the walls. Each is a three-dimensional rendering of an image from some instructional YouTube video: A man speaking urgently into a microphone, a few dozen seated figures staring dumbly at the ceiling, two hands massaging the back of someone's head. There's not a lot of substance here, but there is something brilliantly insightful about the emotional tone. The thermoformed plastic friezes, burgundy-colored and with a fascinatingly furry texture, bring to mind vacuum-formed electronics packaging or the faux velvet interior of a jewelry box. And the effect is to highlight the bitter aftertaste of death and defeat that comes with attempts, like "Quantum Touch" or a self-help guru's injunction to "think positive," to deny discomfort and mortality by sheer force of will.

WILL HEINRICH

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