

SEANKELLY

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Clash of the Items, at a Gallery Near You

Exhibitions at Sean Kelly, Pavel Zoubok and Salon 94



A Sarah Crowner painting and a Chinese bi-disc at Sean Kelly. Jason Wyche/Sean Kelly, New York

Heterogeneity and lots of it is trending among the summer's group shows. The mingling of like with extremely unlike is an increasingly popular curatorial approach, as is arranging them in dense installations. In numerous galleries, works of all mediums, artifacts, and objects of design and craft keep company, often at the behest of outside curators. Different time periods are spanned, disparate cultures contrasted, with all kinds of surprises.

At the Jason McCoy Gallery on 57th Street in Manhattan, Stephanie Buhmann, its director, and Samantha McCoy, its gallery manager, have organized "Domesticity," which begins with Louis Comfort Tiffany glass and Charles Burchfield wallpaper and ends in the vicinity of contemporary art and design. In Chelsea, the Andrew Edlin Gallery is presenting a cornucopia of art that qualifies as insider, outsider and somewhere in between, assembled by the artist Sam Gordon. And in "Machinery for Living," the excellent show organized by the artist Walead Beshty at Petzel, also in Chelsea, supplements a central, but varied core of photography with drawings, sculptures, fashion and furniture to create an elaborate portrayal of modernity. But three shows in particular have, each in its own way, revved things up to a dizzying degree.

SEAN KELLY GALLERY At Sean Kelly, the show "From Pre-History to Post-Everything" accomplishes this not so much by filling space as by arcing back through time to connect the distant past and the present. It has been organized by Janine Cirincione, one of the gallery's directors, who has juxtaposed abstract art by 10 contemporary painters with a large selection of drop-dead-gorgeous ceremonial

antiquities, mostly Neolithic Period and Shang dynasty carved jade from China, and pre-Columbian, sometimes Neolithic carved stone from Latin America.

These pieces are seen here in unusual abundance, and are different from those in most in New York museums. (They're also not behind glass.) The sheer variety of the jade itself can induce lightheadedness, especially the color, veining and textures of a series of Chinese ceremonial bi-discs, flat glass-smooth circles with holes in their centers. Some are so thin light shines through, especially a small one where black is heavily flecked with salmon pink. While their use remains mysterious, it is easy to grasp their visual power and exaltation of nature. Equally enthralling are three carved-stone ritual blades from the Valdivia culture of Ecuador (3500 to 1800 B.C.), whose delicate silhouettes evoke shields, faces and figures, and are enhanced by subtly curved surfaces. There is much more to be studied — Shang blades incised with demonic faces and Taíno grooved stone balls from the Caribbean — in the altogether transformative display.

It may be too much to ask young artists to compete with material of this age and quality, and most of their paintings, while sometimes attractive, fade decorously to the background. They variously reflect the latest ticks of current abstraction: employing unusual materials (joint compound on Sheetrock) or making white monochrome paintings as if Robert Ryman never existed, or worse, working with gestural abandon as if Lyrical Abstraction never did either. Sarah Crouner's taut, hard-edge geometric shapes (painted and sewn together) fight back with their own kind of physical perfection, as do the simple poured compositions of Landon Metz. And Patricia Treib's shapes — sleek in outline but generated by vigorous brushwork — benefit from the company. It's unfortunate that Ms. Crouner and Ms. Treib are represented by only one painting each.

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PAVEL ZOUBOK GALLERY For "The Amusing Style" at the Pavel Zoubok Gallery, an eclectic group of artists, interior decorators and decorative arts dealers were invited to create or contribute to a series of domestic settings in the spirit of the title. That phrase was coined in 2002 by the art historian Christopher Reed in reference to the eccentric interiors favored in between-the-wars Britain, when combinations of modern and Victorian art and objects were the rage and the adjective "amusing" was liberally applied. Implicitly collage-like, the style is in keeping with this gallery's emphasis on the medium.

The overstuffed result is something of a show house in a gallery, complete with study, bedroom and bath. And the totality is supplemented by additional artworks that push the boundaries between art and design or craft, like an especially outstanding painting from the late 1980s made mostly of aluminum foil, colored plastic wrap and tape by Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, and several arrangements of silk eucalyptus leaves, deftly trimmed and decanted by the sculptor Jane Benson.

As in a crowded antiques shop, there is something here for nearly every taste, but you must seek it out, editing or turning a blind eye as you go. The bedroom includes a wonderful French Deco dresser painted with trompe-l'oeil designs. And the bathroom, while dominated by the kitschy ceramic fixtures of Beth Katleman's "Rococornucopia" series, also features an excellent example of Pattern and Decoration painting in Robert Kushner's 1975 "Shower Curtain." A small corner in which everything — hand-painted wallpaper, steel chairs, red clogs and silk-screened silk garments — is the handiwork of the heretofore ceramic artist Ann Agee whetted my interest in what was to come next. So did the assertive and colorful truce between collage and assemblage that the artist Lisa Hoke wrestled from large amounts of cardboard packaging. Works by Man Ray, Derek Jarman, Sari Dienes, Ivan Chermayeff, Max Kuehne and Edward Wormley (represented by an unusual cube side table with paper inlay) put in appearances. There is much more worth attending to in this walk-in cabinet of curiosities, especially chairs and lamps.

SALON 94 At Salon 94 Bowery, "More Material," an exuberant, illuminating array of art, photography, jewelry, fashion, ceramics and whatnot, has been orchestrated by the lawyer turned fashion designer Duro Olowu. (He organized a smaller exhibition at the gallery in 2012.) With over 70 people represented, it shows how they erode the traditional boundaries between artistic disciplines simply by doing what they want with what is at hand.

Crossover efforts by three painters include James Brown's sea-shell-and-glass necklaces, Amy Bessone's torso-shaped ceramic vases and Josh Blackwell's wall pieces, which consist of embroidery on irregular mats made of layered plastic bags.

Freedom and the pervasiveness of creativity are Mr. Olowu's big themes, as is the naturalness of mixing: whether it is the contrasting prints of the garments he designs, the variety of things in his London shop and his own collection, or installations like this. Here, he juxtaposes his own gorgeous, often ethereal evening capes with 25 examples from his collection of short tops called bubas, which are made of Ashoke textiles for Yoruban women of high status, and one of Nick Cave's flamboyantly bejeweled soundsuits, which only the hardiest performer can wear.

Among the photographs are the work of a talented newcomer Sandy Kim, who records strange New York moments in saturated color; the Polaroid portrait studies by the painter Barkley L. Hendricks, and images by lesser-known African studio photographers like Dossa Z. Cosme and Mama Casset. Other unfamiliar names include Sylvie Franquet, who creates needlepoint homages to art and literature and also makes small malformed masks in glazed ceramic; Sarah de Teliga, who paints Cubist abstractions on crushed metal cans; and Cyrus Kabiru, whose handmade metal eyewear is best taken as strange, insectlike sculpture. There are wonderful ceramic vessels by Adam Silverman, Gareth Mason, Tommaso Corvi-Mora, Magdalene Odundo, Summer Wheat and Matthias Merkel Hess. His casts of a West African water kettle amount to very large (and heavy) teapots that might have been glazed by Marimekko.

Mr. Olowu has an omnivorous but exacting eye. Looking at his shows is both humbling and instructive, especially where color is concerned. It's too bad he can't be cloned. The curatorial profession sorely needs wide-open sensibilities like his.