

Art

Six New York City Art Shows to See Right Now

As mid-October rolls around we're enjoying some serious and not-so-serious art by Carrie Mae Weems, Mala Iqbal, Lady Shalamar Montague, and others.



Natalie Haddad, Hrag Vartanian and Hakim Bishara 16 hours ago



A visitor to the Whitney Museum of American Art walks by Manoucher Yektai's "Untitled" (1961) in the permanent collection exhibition. (photo Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

As mid-October rolls around, the chill in the air signals the season of somber reflection. There's much to consider in the world right now, and little to inspire joy. Among our favorite shows of the moment, immersive installations by Carrie Mae Weems and Miatta Kawinzi don't shy away from serious subject matter but they offer meaningful perspectives and, ideally, a sense of solace. Meanwhile, painters Mala Iqbal, Jon Serl, and Manoucher Yektai invite us to lose ourselves in

color, gesture, and other worlds. And Lady Shalamar Montague reminds us that glitter still exists even in the midst of doom. —*Natalie Haddad, Reviews Editor*

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Jon Serl: No straight lines

David Zwirner, 34 East 69th Street, Upper East Side, Manhattan

Through October 26



Jon Serl, "Evening Chapel Parade" (1993) (photo Natalie Haddad/*Hyperallergic*)

Born into a vaudeville family in 1894, Jon Serl's life is the stuff of movies. Working in vaudeville himself, he also did voiceovers for early "talkie" films and held various other jobs under multiple pseudonyms. He began painting to decorate his own home and traded his art for necessities. Luckily for us, his work gained enough attention that it was preserved and exhibited in his long lifetime (he lived to be 99). *No straight lines* intersperses Serl's paintings with complementary works by others, but it's Serl's art that makes this show. His human and nonhuman figures — some bulbous and jolly, others elongated, with Gumby limbs — are odd but never menacing, like grotesques going about their daily business in a world of their own. In "Evening Chapel Parade"

(1993), made in the last year of the artist's life, the cartoonish simplicity of the four figures belies their expressiveness — some gazing forward with welcoming smiles, others looking downtrodden. A small cat in the bottom left corner joins the cavalcade, completing this weirdly charming scene. —*NH*

Lady Shalamar Montague: 3 World Tours

[Kerry Schuss Gallery](#), 73 Leonard Street, Tribeca, Manhattan

Through November 2



Lady Shalamar Montague, “77 ‘Opera Roles!’” (1988) (photo Natalie Haddad/*Hyperallergic*)

What can you say about an artist who called herself Lady Shalamar Montague? Glamour permeates the name. Her art must be glamorous too, maybe dusted with glitter and saturated in jewel colors. That’s what I assumed when I found this show online, and it was even better in person. Born in 1905 as Frances Montague, the daughter of an opera singer, Lady Shalamar lived a fantastical life, or at least that’s the yarn she spun. The drawings on view date from 1984 to 1990, and reveal an artist still enticed by the colorful side of life. Pieces like “77 ‘Opera Roles!’”

(1988) evoke costume illustrations, especially those for the Ballet Russes, and Andy Warhol's early commercial drawings, but with a sense of flair that's right out of a Jack Smith film. Of course, this grand Lady was not merely a reflection of those artists, but a talent all her own, and her drawings, with their exuberant text, streamline the carnivalesque into elegant portraits of a long-lost era. This show pulled me into its world of flamboyant femmes from the moment I walked into the gallery. —*NH*

Carrie Mae Weems: The Shape of Things

Gladstone Gallery, 530 West 21st Street, Chelsea, Manhattan

Through November 9



Installation view of Carrie Mae Weems's *Cyclorama: The Shape of Things* (2021) (photo Hrag Vartanian/*Hyperallergic*)

This giant of contemporary art is showing her “Cyclorama: The Shape of Things” (2021), which premiered at the Park Avenue Armory in 2021, and has been touring museums ever since. Using the popular artistic form of the cyclorama (an early-**19th century version** of one is on permanent display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art), Weems distills scenes of racial injustice. This immersive experience equally repels and attracts in what feels like a very American cycle of

spectacle on display. The 40-minute video in seven parts reflects on the browning of America, sometimes offering us moments that feel as conflicted as they can seem beautiful on the screen.

In adjacent gallery spaces, her *Painting the Town* (2021) series turns what street photographers often call *Street Rothkos* into images of erasure of the anti-racist graffiti that filled American streets after the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

What makes Weems's art particularly poignant is her refusal to be didactic. Instead, she prefers to open spaces and allows us to fill them with our own cultural imagination. —*Hrag Vartanian*

Mala Iqbal: The Edge of an Encounter

JJ Murphy Gallery, 53 Stanton Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Through November 9



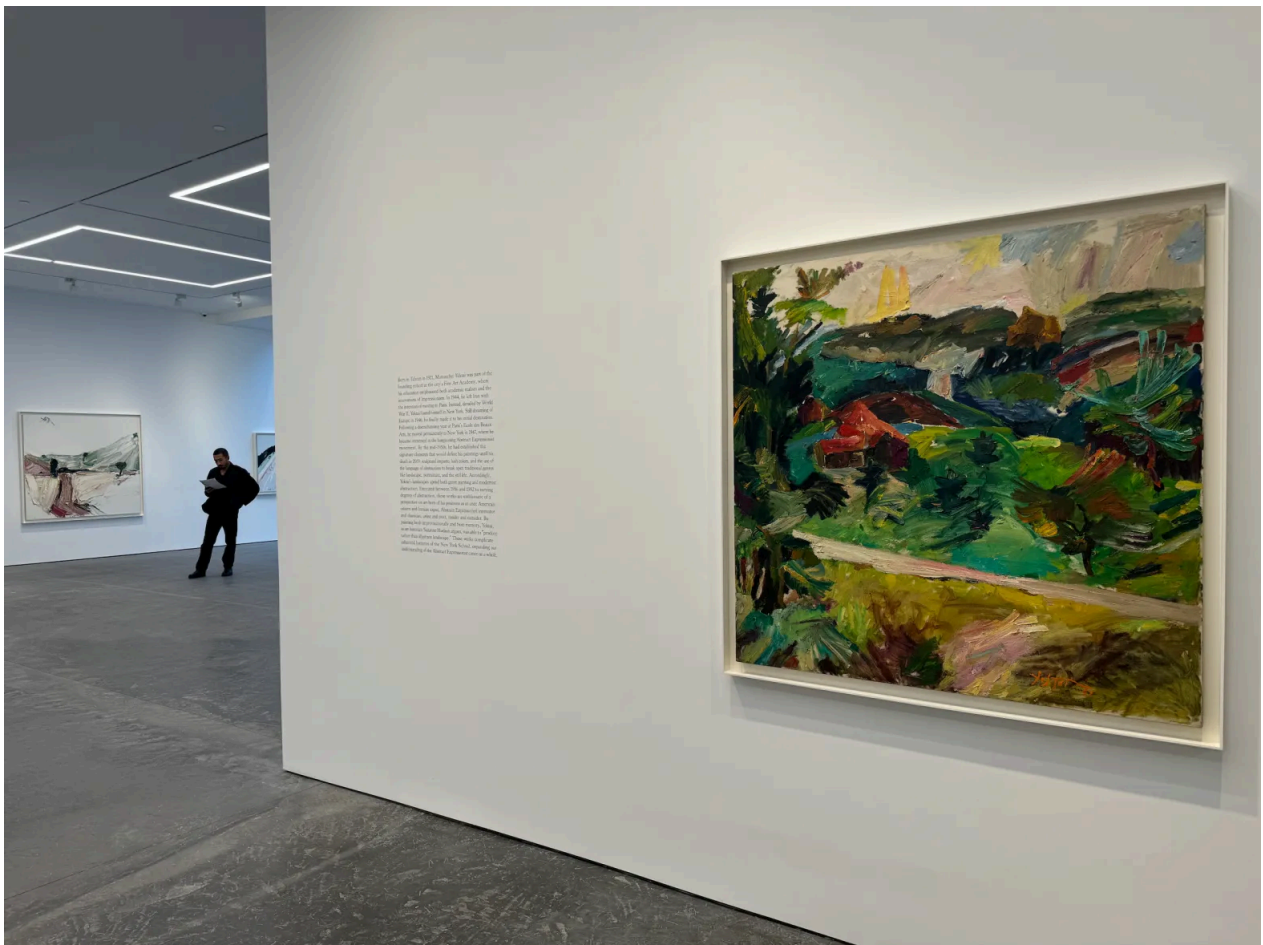
Mala Iqbal, "Interruption" (2024), oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches (~183 x 244 cm) (photo Hakim Bishara/*Hyperallergic*)

Intractable wars and demonic weapons, entire families wiped out in one-minute airstrikes, children starved to death, elderly people crushed under the boots of soldiers, millions turned into helpless refugees, a defeated middle class rapidly sinking into poverty, unintelligent leaders, cowardly intellectuals, feckless artists, fake allies, thieves and liars at every corner, empires crashing into the dust, wolves baring their teeth, billionaires foaming at the mouth, people hiding inside their phones, where on Instagram a heart-wrenching photo of a mournful mother who lost everything is followed by an ad for a robot vacuum cleaner. On the sidelines of this mayhem that we're living through are honest witnesses like Mala Iqbal, whose outstanding suite of paintings for this exhibition will leave you with a strange, unfathomable sense of hope. —*Hakim Bishara*

Manoucher Yektai Landscapes

Karma Gallery, 549 West 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan

Through November 9



A view of Manoucher Yektai's Landscapes exhibition at Karma Chelsea, including, foreground, "Vermont Landscape" (1957), and, background, "Untitled" (1976) (photo Hrag Vartanian/*Hyperallergic*)

Iranian-born Manoucher Yektai's Abstract Expressionist art flew under the radar for decades, but renewed interest in his work is offering us a fresh look at a movement that can do with a more

expansive range of perspectives.

While Yektai, who died in 2019, was the subject of reviews by such leading American critics as John Ashbery, Dore Ashton, Hilton Kramer, Annette Michelson, Robert Pincus-Witten, Fairfield Porter, Harold Rosenberg, and Irving Sandler, he remains largely unknown even to aficionados of American painting — though nowadays you can see one of his works hanging in the Whitney Museum of American Art alongside paintings by Lee Krasner, Ed Clark, and Hedda Sterne, three other artists who have been the subject of revivals themselves.

This exhibition focuses on his most riveting series, his landscapes. The paintings chart a journey from European-inflected landscapes like “Vermont Landscape” (1957) and “Untitled” (1957) — which can look like a mash of Chaim Soutine and Paul Cézanne — to more abstract compositions, like “Untitled” (1976), which evokes gestural tendencies you’ve seen in the art of Joan Mitchell and late Willem de Kooning. Yet, it’s also clear that Yektai has taken those Modernist innovations in new directions that are uniquely his own, which I’d situate between legibility and pure abstraction, with a proclivity for thickly textured surfaces. Yektai’s marks suggest a sense of freedom that he visually captures in paint. —*HV*

Miatta Kawinzi: Numma Yah

Smack Mellon, 92 Plymouth Street, Dumbo, Brooklyn

Through November 17



Miatta Kawinzi's "to trust the ground might free us (begin again)" (2024) (photo Hrag Vartanian/*Hyperallergic*)

Feeling rooted in the world has become a rare occurrence. Diasporic realities color the lives of more and more individuals, resulting from forced and voluntary migrations caused by economic hardship, war, and other factors. In Miatta Kawinzi's atmospheric installation, sound, video, and wrapped copper wire play with our perceptions of space and project onto us a landscape that feels familiar but not easily placed.

Filmed both in Liberia and the US, "to trust the ground might free us (begin again)" (2024) is a moving short video that seems to wish for a world beyond flags and borders, one that heals as much as fractures. The artist clearly sought to create a space for soothing in this cavernous Dumbo nonprofit gallery, and I can honestly say she's very much succeeded. Even the rumbling of trains across the Manhattan Bridge that are always in earshot seem to transform into rustling. Like the leaves in the video, they offer us moments of shady respite. —*HV*