

a pictorial balancing act. And the dress at the bottom edge, is it about to dissolve? Are we?

This gallery, as others on the Lower East Side, continues to surprise and take chances from one show to the next. Others of particular note: Lorenzo Bueno and Max Guy; Joe W. Speier, *Making Space*.

GEORGES DE LA TOUR, *From Shadow to Light*, Curated by Dr. Gail Feigenbaum and Pierre Curie, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, Sept. 11, 2025–Jan. 25, 2026. This was an exceptional opportunity to view more than thirty masterpieces—among only forty known paintings—by the great master of light. Often illuminated by a single candle, de la Tour gives equal reverence to saints and common people, from John the Baptist to the *Woman Catching Fleas*. In our time, when painting is all too often a poster-type illustration, here was cinematic revelation. You could almost feel the heat of the flame, see its flicker in the darkness beyond.

VAGINAL DAVIS, *Magnificent Product*, Organized by Jody Graf and Sheldon Gooch, MoMA PSI, Oct. 9, 2025–Mar. 2, 2026.



A force of nature barely tamed or contained by the seemingly inescapable capacity of institutions to “make nice” when niceties are never part of an artist’s equation, to present provocation as somehow less toothsome and biting. With Miss Davis you either go with the flow, at times a torrent, or wisely step aside. The curators bravely embraced the mayhem, magic, and irreverence that was her romp through the 1970s, ‘80s, ‘90s, and beyond. With ‘zines like *Fertile Latoya Jackson*, her bands ¡Cholita!, the female Menudo, and Pedro, Muriel & Esther (their Steve Albini-recorded ‘96 release, *The White To Be Angry*, is a classic), Miss Davis laid down the gauntlet for “anti-normative, anti-capitalist punk, and queer politics.” (thank you wall text.) Referring to herself as a Blacktress, turning wherever she was into her stage, always larger than life, playing the encore first, Miss Davis foregrounded race and sexuality with raucous humor and flowing innuendo.

The exhibition included three standout installations. *Naked on my Oxygoat: Faustus—Anal Deep Throat*, a collaboration with Jonathan Berger that takes the *Wizard Of Oz* into other realms, accompanied by wall paintings created with makeup; *The Wicked Pavilion: A Tween Bedroom*; and an archival extravaganza barely veiled by sheer curtains. There was also Miss Davis’s complete literary body of work. Rows of books lined high shelves, kept away

from tiny, prying hands. She didn’t even have to write them. She only had to imagine their hilarious titles. Our favorite: *Your Pussy Killed My Husband*. (The retrospective was initially organized by Hendrik Folkerts at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm in 2024.)

JOEL WYLLIE, *Aerial the Projectionist*, Foreign & Domestic, Oct. 9–Nov. 9. Otherworldly drawings of which photos barely do justice. Not to mention the unavoidable reflection of gallery lights, though they added to the strangeness of already mutant/poignant images. (They provided one of the darker, more ominous heads with what might be luminous horns.) Drawings are often about touch, the hovering hand of the artist, and these alien-appearing visages have a tenderness, even when what returns our gaze is an ovoid head with four eyes set North, South, East and West—*Silo* (2025). How light is the touch? Rather than visible pencil marks, these images might have been created with graphite dust blown across the surface of the paper by the breeze from an open window. The artist-as-medium.

Other images, made with color pencils, soft pinkish tones, are more playful, having an architectural aspect, a balancing act where a ball sits atop a slender disc, tilting off of a cone-shaped structure. In one tall, narrow drawing, the disc elongates on a near vertical pitch, a face seen in sharp profile, the spherical, patterned ball prominently nosing its way forward.

*Cynthia* (2024) immediately reminded us of the scene in the movie *Brazil*, when an older woman who’s having her face stretched to appear years younger gets pulled tauter than taut, and then ... bang, explodes. Life can be like that at times. When going too far.

We weren’t familiar with the work of Joel Wyllie, British, born 1986. This was his first show in New York and it was a real discovery.

To our mind, Foreign & Domestic’s was consistently the most interesting gallery program across the year, with one engaging exhibition after another, among them: ... *aeronauts aimed for altitude, even ...*, curated by Marco Bene; Lee Brozgol, *1977–1981* (presented at 150 Barrow Street); Harris Rosenblum, *Hybrid Moments*.

PHILIP GUSTON: *The Irony of History*, Musée Picasso, Paris, Curated by Didier Ottinger and Joanne Sneath, Oct. 14, 2025–Mar. 1, 2026.



A great pairing of Guston and Picasso, and perfectly from the very first room with Guston’s *The Studio* (1969)

alongside Picasso’s *The Artist before His Canvas*, from that fateful year, 1938, marked by the Anschluss and the Spanish Civil War.

More than forty years after his passing, Guston meets our political moment. What does that say about the past and its repetition? You can’t help but wonder what he would be painting if he was here now. Guston took on Nixon by way of Philip Roth’s *Our Gang* in 1972. Would he find humor in the horror and cruelty of the gangsters we’re menaced by today? Guston’s Klan-like hooded figures might be rounding up people indiscriminately on our streets as we speak. The planes in *Bombardment* (1937) could be missiles over Kyiv, exploding into homes as families sleep.

Oddly enough, Guston’s 1972 drawing, *Untitled (Artists and Critics)*, in which an artist is seen to have plunged a knife into an art critic’s chest, was a favorite. Back then, of course, criticism posed a much greater threat than it does now, or may ever again.

KEITH LAFUENTE, *Acts of Service*, SoMad, Oct. 16–Dec. 19.



Hands down one of the most materially inventive, mischievous minds making art now, always with a healthy dose of humor as well as real poignancy. Spectacle may dazzle us, and some of Lafuente’s mechanical marvels are surely spectacular, but it can be a show’s details that resonate. One of the smaller, quieter pieces here stood out among the riotous proceedings. *Souvenir 3 (Words of Affirmation)* (2025), balances a found ceramic coffee mug on the back of a miniature Asian figurine. The original text on the mug—“When life seems hard, the courageous don’t lie down and accept defeat; instead they are all the more determined to struggle for a better future”—comes from Queen Elizabeth’s 2008 Christmas broadcast. In Lafuente’s version, “When life seems hard, the courageous lie down and accept defeat; they are determined to struggle.” This might well be a comment on the royal family circa now. Hopefully it may serve as a call-to-arms for the rest of us. File under: reverse child psychology.

Lafuente’s practice encompasses clothing, jewelry, sculpture, performance, and film. His drag persona is Mahal Kita, a name that means “I love you” in Tagalog—the language spoken in Luzon and nearby Philippine islands, where his family is from, a culture that clearly informs all he does. Pattern and color (he painted the walls canary yellow) vividly animate an irreverent, inventive sensibility, a vision that fluidly interweaves goofiness and seriousness of purpose, not mutually exclusive. (On a visit during the artist’s residency, as he was planning the show, an index card bore a note that immediately caught our attention and has stayed with us: “Embarrassment as kink.”) In a show conceived as an

immersive installation, Lafuente was operating wholly within a sculptural realm, and at full, giddy velocity.

TRISHA DONNELLY, *The Drawing Center*, Oct. 17, 2025–Feb. 1, 2026.

A small antechamber was built at the gallery entrance, where one of our favorite drawings of Donnelly’s, one of her headiest, greeted visitors: *Untitled (Drawing through the Wall)*, 2004. The image rendered as if an unseen force flew past a sort of leather breastplate, leaving it with edges rubbed soft and jaggedly torn. Graphite on paper, appearing entirely sculptural. We know the work from when it was shown all those years ago, and there is a reciprocal part, the image as if it had been blown clear through the wall and out the other side. Phenomenal in every sense. What would be the first drawing, seen from behind, should be on the other side of the wall. But it wasn’t. You didn’t encounter it until you got to the second gallery, where there was a fantastic group show, in harmonic convergence with Donnelly’s, *Voice of Space: UFOs and Paranormal Phenomena*. This second drawing had to pass through a number of walls, traversing the full length of the open room before it finally came to rest. No less than an unidentified flying image.

In the main gallery, the lights were dimmed. A calm, hushed space of observation. Another favorite, *hedm!*, 2005, imbued with a golden glow, equally phenomenal and quietly seismic. What can be done with humble materials—ink, color pencil, graphite—is nothing less than magical. How could we be sure of what we saw? Words, hieroglyphic and dissolving? A skeletal leg, from femur to knee socket, tibia and toes? Can images be identified? Does it matter? They are elusive and strangely beautiful. And in a little alcove to the left of the doorway as you came in, or to the right before you left, there was a drawing, *Untitled* (2010) that incorporates a video loop with a hyperactive, vibrating blue orb.

When we made a return visit to the show, there was a class of third graders, who, we were told, had been asked what they saw in the drawings. One of the kids only offered a single word: *Power*.

KAYODE OJO, *Black Swan Moan*, Balice Hertling, Paris, Oct. 18–Nov. 29.



One of Kayode Ojo’s best shows. Everything he does so well—suggesting a glamorous body where only the signs