

# What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Jason Farago, Martha Schwendener, Will Heinrich and Jillian Steinhauer

Oct. 24, 2018

## Noah Purifoy

*Through Nov. 3. Tilton Gallery, 8 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-737-221, [jacktiltongallery.com](http://jacktiltongallery.com).*

In the rough, dexterous assemblages of the Los Angeles artist Noah Purifoy (1917–2004), a Duchampian embrace of found objects fused with a political activism that went out of the gallery and extended to a decade in California government. He was the subject of an impassioned posthumous retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2015; his expansive **Joshua Tree Outdoor Museum**, with more than 100 sculptures made from junk materials, draws pilgrims to the Mojave Desert. Yet there has never been a Purifoy exhibition on the East Coast before this very welcome outing at Tilton, which includes a baker's dozen of his later, mostly wall-mounted constructions.

Purifoy was born in Alabama and went to Los Angeles in his late 30s, becoming the first African-American to enroll at the Chouinard Arts Institute (now the California Institute of the Arts). He turned decisively to assemblage after the Watts rebellion of 1965, making use of debris from the riots; later he stepped back from art for a decade and worked for a California state agency and continued working with found materials in Joshua Tree, where he moved in 1989 and made nearly all the works in this show.

Some of the wall-mounted works here consist almost wholly of found objects. Two assemblages from 1989 called “Rags and Old Iron (After Nina Simone),” bristling yet carefully balanced, graft together a tennis racket, frayed scraps of fabric, dangling beads and a pitchfork. Their part-by-part construction takes inspiration as freely from central African sculpture traditions as from Dada, as much from the history of jazz as the Nouveau Réalisme of Jean Tinguely and Arman. Other assemblages here have more finely worked wooden pieces. In “Black, Brown and Beige (After Duke Ellington)” (1989), combs and spindles and scraps of wicker nestle in round-edge wood cartouches that recall a disassembled piano.

Spend some time looking closely at “Access” (1993). It's loaded, nearly overloaded, with a pair of faucets, busted hubcaps, worn sandals and the business end of a spade, that last being one of several elements with a racial overtone. It is so jam-packed it seems it could topple. Keeping it together, making it endure, was the effort of a lifetime's work in which art and advocacy were one and history was a junkyard ripe for gleaning. JASON FARAGO

## Henning Christiansen

*Through Nov. 2. Blank Forms, 55 Walker Street, Manhattan; [blankforms.org](http://blankforms.org).*



Installation view of Henning Christiansen's show, "Freedom Is Around the Corner," a visually rich sampling from more than 50 years of his oeuvre.

Norman Wilcox-Geissen/Blank Forms; Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, via VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

"Revolution is in the air," wrote the Danish composer and artist Henning Christiansen (1932-2008) in a 1969 essay addressed to the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, reprinted in a catalog viewable in his show, "Freedom Is Around the Corner," at Blank Forms. "The vibrations of the youth revolution," he wrote, "have spread into debate on art, literature and music, with a massive politicization of attitudes as a result." Mr. Christiansen, who was associated with the '60s Fluxus movement, channeled that sense of revolution into experimental music made with axes and sledgehammers, as well as radical scores, sculptures, collages and films.

You can see and hear all of these in this rich and quirky sampling from more than 50 years of his oeuvre. An illuminated green plastic sculpture with a pitched roof stands in the center of the space. The words "Poetical Economy" are painted on its side, proposing Mr. Christiansen's preferred form of exchange. Sock sculptures on the wall resemble ecstatic figures; painted shoes strung with bells repurpose mundane objects. A black-and-white film featuring shirtless men slathered with mud suggests a return to some primal state.

A grid of album covers near the entrance attests to Mr. Christiansen's commitment to altering the landscape of sound and experimental music, shifting performance away from what he called the "usual shut-up-and-listen concert." A poster for a 1985 show at the zoo in Rome exemplifies his expanded approach and audience. After all, the revolution needs to be both inward and outward, he wrote to Stockhausen, with human beings becoming more "accommodating and flexible and less authoritarian, and you must of course also demand that their societies do the same." MARTHA SCHWENDENER

## Charles White

*Through Nov. 10. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 100 11th Avenue, Manhattan. 212-247-0082; michaelrosenfeldart.com.*



Charles White's 1973 portrait of the singer and political activist Paul Robeson; oil and graphite on illustration board. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

After seeing MoMA's Charles White retrospective (which earned a **rave** from Holland Cotter), you'll want to head to Chelsea for "Truth and Beauty: Charles White and His Circle" at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. Along with more of this midcentury master's paintings, oil washes and gorgeous drawings, "Truth and Beauty" includes a generous selection of work by contemporaries and successors of White (1918-79) who have also explored blackness as an abstract quality or condition through sensitive depictions of distinct individuals.

In White's sepia-toned, oil and graphite drawing of the singer and activist Paul Robeson, from 1973, the subject's head is placed in the bottom third of a circular panel. Though Robeson looks up into a cloud of dark brush strokes, the way he's lit — with highlights on cheeks, nose and forehead — suggests that the cloud itself is a source of light. A charged use of monochrome is even more striking in "Let the Light Enter," a tall and narrow 1961 portrait of a young woman that hangs next to a stunning mixed-media painting by Kerry James Marshall, who studied with White.

White's overall composition is so dark that the unlit side of the woman's body isn't so much shadowed as erased. But his modeling and modulating hues are so subtle that, despite this annihilating weight of color, she remains unmistakable. The flatter and more uniform black of the female nude in Mr. Marshall's "You Must Suffer if You Want to be Beautiful," by contrast, pushes the color's political subtext right to the front.

"I Been Rebuked & I Been Scorned (Solid as a Rock)," from 1954, shows an older woman with an upward-tilted gaze resting two enormous fists in her lap. The density of White's charcoal mark gives the figure an indubitable physical presence, while its softness gives that presence a spiritual quality. The formal similarity of skin, shadow and

background means that all three share an implication of unknown depths, which is what gives the portrait its distinctive humanity. WILL HEINRICH

## Indicators

*Through Nov. 11. Storm King Art Center, 1 Museum Road, New Windsor, N.Y.; 845-534-3115, stormking.org.*



Gabriela Salazar's "Matters in Shelter (and Place, Puerto Rico)," from 2018, in "Indicators," at the Storm King Art Center.

Gabriela Salazar; photograph by Jerry L. Thompson

In the wake of a **recent United Nations report** that says the coral reefs may die off as soon as 2040, traveling to Storm King Art Center to see an exhibition about climate change may not sound like fun. Yet "Indicators," which is spread throughout the sculpture park, is more of a prompt than a warning. The 17 artists and collectives in this show favor conceptualism and speculation over the urge to preach.

One exception of sorts is Justin Brice Guariglia's "We Are the Asteroid" (2018), a **highway message sign** that broadcasts pithy sayings like its title. It's a cousin in cleverness to "General Assembly" (2018), an installation by the collective Dear Climate that consists of a circle of banners whose slogans encourage viewers to "fete the fungus" and "let them eat CO2" — a branding campaign for the environment.

Most works are more meditative. David Brooks has made 30 bronze casts of tree parts, rocks and other natural objects found in Storm King's woods and placed them alongside the originals. Called "Permanent Field Observations" (2018), it prompts you to imagine a future in which only the man-made sculptures remain.

Discussions of climate change often focus on predictions. Two of the strongest works remind us that the effects are already here. Gabriela Salazar's "Matters in Shelter (and Place, Puerto Rico)" (2018) looks like a cross between an emergency shelter and a temple, while Allison Janae Hamilton's tambourine towers suggest resilience born out of precariousness. Ms. Hamilton's work is titled after a lyric in a 1928 hymn that sounds all too familiar these days: "The peo-ple cried mer-cy in the storm." JILLIAN STEINHAUER