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WEEKEND FINE ARTS/ LEISURE

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## ART IN REVIEW

**James VanDerZee**  
**Betye Saar**  
**Michael Rosenfeld Gallery**  
**24 West 57th Street**  
**Through Nov. 2**

The great photographer of Harlem life James VanDerZee (1886-1985) specialized in black celebrities and successful middle-class families as well as the streets, buildings, parades, church doings and other functions of this extraordinary enclave. His lens captured the intellectual lights of the Harlem Renaissance and the belligerent members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, founded in 1917 by Marcus Garvey.

His ambition was to make Harlem beautiful, or at least to reflect the beauty he saw in it, and to that end he took thousands of photographs and perfected them in his Guarantee Photo Studio. He used all manner of props and devices to enhance his work, often creating elaborate settings and then retouching the results with etching knife and oil paint.

"Harlem Guaranteed," a selection of some 30 photographs, makes a small but dynamic show, with shots that range from "mortuary" views of bodies in their coffins to cornerstone layings, which to him symbolized Harlem's solidity. And so did

the wonderful luxury of his 1934 portrait of one Josephine Becton in her flower-bedecked living room, accompanied by a piano, a silver tea service and a large open Valentine's heart full of chocolates.

The show is aptly paired with "Colored: Consider the Rainbow," a group of autobiographical assemblages and collages by Betye Saar. What's striking, apart from Ms. Saar's usual cleverness of concept and craftsmanship, is the use of old photographs to enhance autobiographical memories.

The photographs help to create small shrines. In "Sandy," a faded picture of a gambling man, a sporty type in a double-breasted suit, cockily facing the camera, is surrounded by collaged trophies of his persona: dice, playing cards, a razor, collar and cuff studs. A celebration of "Miss Ruby Brown" depicts a woman in spiffy turn-of-the-last-century garb, wearing a red suit and a big red hat, in a photograph touched by a real red kid glove mounted near it.

Sometimes the work becomes too cute, as in a couple of collages of baby clothes, but most of the evidence points to the fact that Ms. Saar's inventiveness continues to flower. GRACE GLUECK

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