The New York Times

Art Gallery Shows to See in February

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By Jillian Steinhauer, Travis Diehl, Will Heinrich and Andrew Russeth

Published Feb. 5, 2026 Updated Feb. 26, 2026

This week in Newly Reviewed, Jillian Steinhauer covers a group show of self-taught artists, Rotimi Fani-Kayode's homoerotic formalism and Claudia Bitrán "Titanic."

TRIBECA

'Inventing Abstraction'

Through March 21. Shrine, 368 Broadway; 212-381-1395, shrine.nyc.

Nnena Kalu, Untitled (2022), mixed media assemblage on wood base. Nnena Kalu, via Shrine

Scholars have often positioned self-taught art as something pure, made by people who feel an irrepressible need to express themselves. So what happens when that expression is not representational, and therefore more readily legible, but abstract?

That's the question underlying "Inventing Abstraction," an intriguing exhibition curated by the longtime gallerist Jay Gorney. The show gathers works by 16 self-taught artists from across eras and places: canonized greats like Martín Ramírez (1895-1963), who was born in Mexico and institutionalized in California; lesser-known practitioners like Melvin Edward Nelson (1908-1992), who lived on a farm in Oregon; and contemporary figures like the recent Turner Prize winner Nnena Kalu.

What they have in common is their creation of nonrepresentational work — itself a fairly broad category. Here, it encompasses Hawkins Bolden's assemblages, Emery Blagdon's dangling wire sculptures and J.B. Murray's invented language, among others. The show is filled with great pieces, and resonances emerge between them, like the wrapped bundles of Kalu and Judith Scott or the colorful, markedly formal paintings of Michael Mangino and Marlon Mullen.

The news release accompanying the show calls self-taught abstraction "the result of sheer invention," as opposed to the avant-garde tradition in which Wassily Kandinsky — often credited with making the first abstract painting — was working.

But the separation of abstract art from other forms is a Western concept; in fact, humans have created visual patterns and imbued them with meaning since ancient times. If there's any lesson to draw, it may be that abstraction is not an anomaly, but simply another way of representing ourselves. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

CHELSEA

Rotimi Fani-Kayode

Through March 14. Hales, 547 West 20th Street; 646-590-0776, halesgallery.com.

Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Untitled (1988-89/2018-2026), silver gelatin print. Rotimi Fani-Kayode; via Autograph, London, and Hales London/New York

The photographs in “Forest of Metaphor,” Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s exhibition at Hales, may look familiar. The 16 black-and-white images depict mostly nude Black men, often holding props or wearing sexual paraphernalia, like a leather harness. Pictures like these have become part of art’s lexicon — think Robert Mapplethorpe or Paul Mpagi Sepuya. But when Fani-Kayode was making them, in the late 1980s, they were rare and revelatory.

Fani-Kayode (1955-1989) studied with Mapplethorpe, but he came to photography from an entirely different point of view. He was born in Nigeria, where his father was a Yoruba priest. His family fled the civil war in 1966, and Fani-Kayode grew up in Brighton, England. In 1983, he moved to the Brixton area of London, a diverse, working-class neighborhood that was a hotbed of political and artistic activity.

Fani-Kayode used himself, his partner and friends as models. The intimacy of those relationships is evident. Like Mapplethorpe, Fani-Kayode was forging a homoerotic formalism, but rather than being fetishistic or shocking, his pictures are sensitive and playful.

Take an untitled image featuring a white man sitting on a Black man’s shoulders. Together they create a kind of alphabetic, two-toned shape, and there’s the symbolism of a Black man literally holding up a white one. But Fani-Kayode keeps the photograph real

as much as he turns it into a metaphor. You can feel the effort and precariousness in his subjects' bodies; whatever they represent, they are also, inescapably, human. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

TRIBECA

Claudia Bitrán

Through March 28. Cristin Tierney, 49 Walker Street; 212-594-0550, cristintierney.com.

Claudia Bitrán, Titanic, A Deep Emotion" (2013-24), three-channel video installation. Rebekah Modrak via Claudia Bitrán and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

In 2014, the artist Claudia Bitrán started remaking James Cameron's movie "Titanic" shot by shot. She thought the project would take a year or so; instead it took 12.

The resulting work, "Titanic, A Deep Emotion," is the centerpiece of this exhibition, which also includes paintings, storyboards, notes and more. It's presented not as a single-track film, but as a three-channel video that runs nearly an hour and a half. The format, which mixes narrative and production, foregrounds the dogged creativity of Bitrán's process and the manic absurdity of her quest.

When "Titanic" came out, in 1997, it was the most expensive movie ever made. Bitrán, on the other hand, did not have much of a budget. So she painted and animated the boat and built icebergs using cardboard boxes. She recruited friends and family as actors, including a 10-year-old cousin who plays one of the film's 39 Jacks, the male lead — although many of those Jacks are women.

The artist herself is the only constant: She plays the main character, Rose. There's dialogue in Spanish, a threesome, a synchronized swimming routine and shots of children playing on a real inflatable Titanic slide that, almost unbelievably, stopped working and began to collapse (no one was hurt).

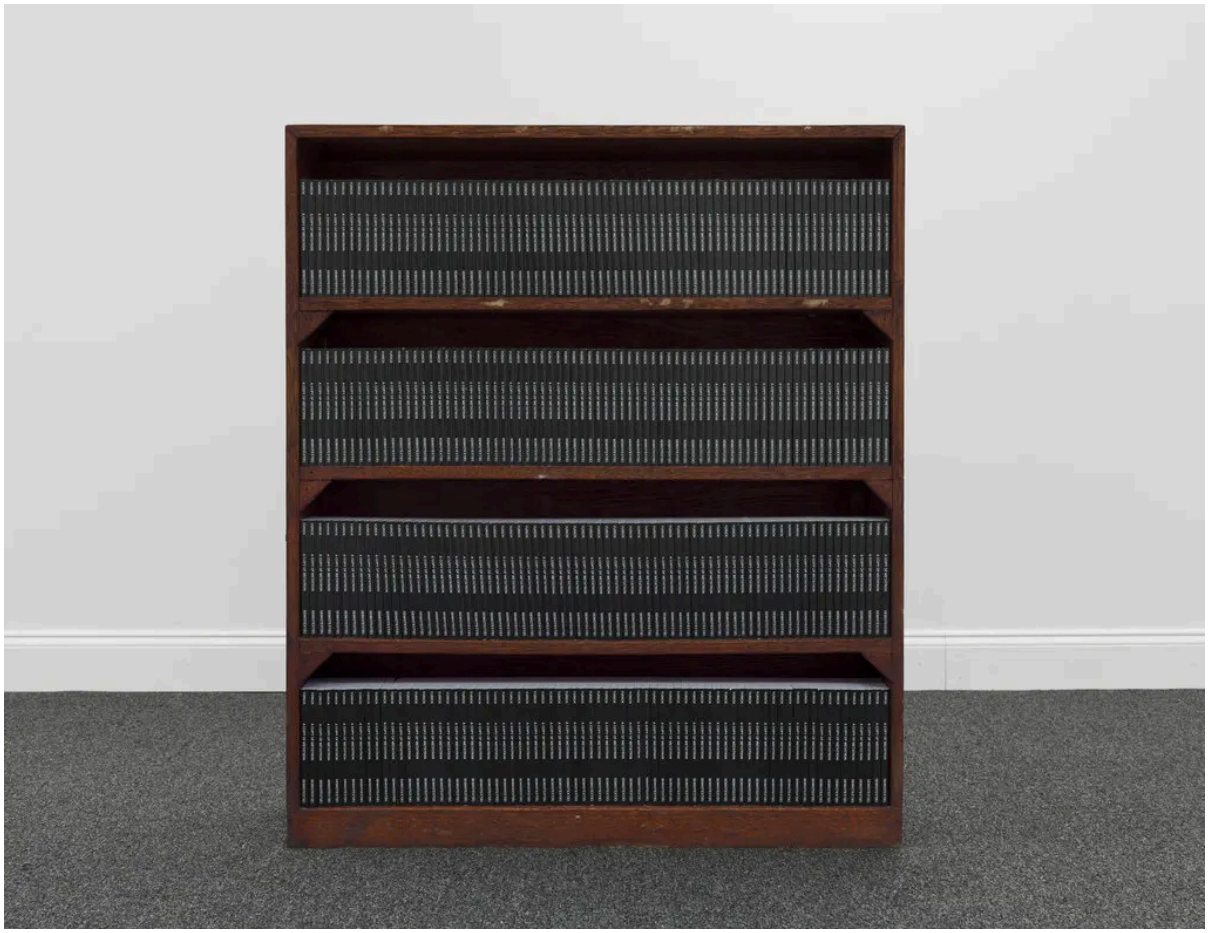
"Titanic, A Deep Emotion" is a D.I.Y. labor of love. And while it delights with sincere silliness, it also reveals the possibilities of pop culture. Bitrán doesn't treat her source material as something canonical — more as a malleable text. Rather than passively consume or imitate it, she insists that we're all entitled to make it our own. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

Last Chance

CHINATOWN

Joel Dean

Through March 1. Turquoise, 81 Elizabeth Street; turquoisenyc.com.



Joel Dean, "A Copy of Metatron" (2026), perfect-bound paperback book. Joel Dean, via Turquoise, New York

When artists add books to their sculptures or installations, it often comes across as pretentious and lazy. But Joel Dean's new show works, possibly because it's all books, and all the same one: a faithful reproduction of "Metatron" by the writer and activist Sol

Yurick (author of “The Warriors”), published in 1985. A careworn copy sits on a pedestal.

The new edition, titled “A Copy of Metatron,” packed a bookshelf. They’re free to take; as of Tuesday, there were 70 left. It seems like Dean truly wants people to read the book. Why? Maybe because its mystical descriptions of cybernetic consciousness and angels made of data presage today’s evangelistic rhetoric around artificial general intelligence and the “singularity.” This dense, brawling text, in a stubbornly physical yet mobile presentation, demonstrates how much today’s tech depends on yesterday’s imagination. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

TRIBECA

Becky Howland

Through Feb. 28. James Fuentes, 52 White Street; 212-577-1201, jamesfuentes.com.

Becky Howland, “Oil Spill & Camouflage” (2007-2025), oil on canvas with backing board. Becky Howland, via James Fuentes Gallery, New York

Becky Howland (part of the Colab art collective) presents two bodies of work in two different registers — one cosmic, one quotidian. For the cosmic, there’s “Oil Spill and Camouflage,” 2007/2025, a bitter mandala built around the figure of a burning girl in the

lotus position like a self-immolating monk. The translucent silhouettes of B-2 stealth bombers form a motif over the earthy camo and iridescent oil.

Another set of large paintings depict skittering, crossing flower arrangements, resembling chaotic botanical drawings; these sanctify New York City's so-called weeds. On both macro and micro scales, these paintings find wild peace. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHINATOWN

Bryce Kroll

Through March 7. Parent Company, 154 East Broadway; 929-324-6615, parentcompany.net.

Installation view of "Bryce Kroll: Crap Shoot." Bryce Kroll, via Parent Company

Bryce Kroll's new sculptures are mounted low on the wall, level with the power outlets and pipes. This matches their aura of menacing utility. Generated partly by feeding sketches into artificial intelligence, they fall into the uncanny valley between abstract blobs and sci-fi weaponry, hinting at the innate violence of technology.

Each piece is 3-D printed and airbrushed in grays, yellows and blues in a way that imitates the dramatic lighting of a first-person shooter video game. One central piece, "Off Shoot 1," mounted vertically from the ceiling, has the grainy texture of weathered wood. It's as if the software actualized the imagination games of boys who see sticks and think of guns. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

LITTLE ITALY

Clémence de La Tour du Pin

Through March 7. Derosia, 197 Grand Street; 646-329-5048, derosia.nyc.

Clémence de La Tour du Pin, “Untitled” (2025), oil and alabaster on linen, ribbon. Clémence de La Tour du Pin, via Derosia

These lengthy paintings approach the dimensions of floorboards; their surfaces are gummy, rubbery with walnut brown paint. One is decorated with white silk threads, two others with broken umbrella ribs and brad nails. One even tapers to a point, like the slats do in irregular older buildings. The overall effect suggests a grungy factory converted to a painting studio. They are splinters from the artist’s garret. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHELSEA

William Eggleston

Through March 7. David Zwirner, 533 West 19th Street; 212-727-2070, davidzwirner.com.

William Eggleston, “Untitled” (1970), dye transfer print. Eggleston Artistic Trust, via David Zwirner

In the 1970s, William Eggleston made the humble color snapshot his own. The artist framed the sorts of subjects that may constitute an arty Instagram grid — a car’s balding tire, a bare bulb on a blue ceiling, a toilet in triple-sec light — with casual virtuosity.

Not only does he have a gimlet eye; he achieved saturated, almost wet-looking hues using a tricky dye-transfer process. This show, called “The Last Dyes,” presents 31 new prints made from vintage negatives using the last existing chemistry of this type — maybe a sales gimmick, but certainly a fresh chance to appreciate this peak of analog photographic craft. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHINATOWN

Alex Kwartler

Through Feb. 28. Magenta Plains, 149 Canal Street; 917-388-2464, magentaplains.com.

Alex Kwartler, “Homophone,” 2025, oil and canvas on linen with can. via Alex Kwartler and Magenta Plains

The 30 recent paintings that make up Alex Kwartler’s “Off-Peak” at Magenta Plains range across an enormous variety of styles, mediums and surfaces. There’s oil and there’s ink, there’s linen and there’s plaster. A dryly rendered left hand walks its fingers daintily across the bottom edge of one picture plane (“Right (ii)”), while the round bottom of a tuna can, embedded in another, floats in a graded field of black and gray (“Homophone”).

There’s nothing loud about all this variety, though. Even at their most graphic or brightly colored, the paintings have a kind of diffidence. It probably helps that they’re almost all small enough to fit into a briefcase.

Kwartler has compared the works, which he typically makes in a single sitting, to everyday moments — simple, forthright and unadorned. They also bear a passing resemblance to the terms of an alphabet, or glossary: They’re installed in a steady line around the room; he uses all his different materials in ways that converge to the same flat effect; and the figurative imagery, when there is any, doesn’t tell you much more or less than the color fields. So the paintings, or the choices that go into them, can seem interchangeable.

Of course they aren't, really, any more than any of the other everyday choices we all make — what to wear, what we call ourselves, what we believe. But by making them seem as if they could be, Kwartler reveals their transience and delicacy, with implications that go all the way down. *WILL HEINRICH*

CHINATOWN

John Duff

Through Feb. 28. Reena Spaulings Fine Art, 165 East Broadway; 212-477-5006, reenaspaulings.com.

John Duff, "Untitled," 2024, bricks, cement, rubber, asphalt, glass bottle. via John Duff and Reena Spaulings Fine Art; Photo by Joerg Lohse

If even a few more artists had as many off-the-wall ideas as the sculptor John Duff, art would be a much richer domain, and writers tasked with making sense of it would have a far more difficult job.

Born in 1943 and based in New York since the late 1960s, Duff is a contemporary of leading Post-Minimalists, but he bobs and weaves around sundry modes, wielding industrial materials like concrete, steel, rubber and fiberglass. His 21 works at Reena

Spaulings — half from the past few years, the rest older — are united by a gritty inventiveness and a canny elusiveness. Class him with Robert Grosvenor and Lee Bontecou as a creator of objects that harbor secrets and then unfold them slowly.

From the start, Duff seemed to be challenging himself to see what he could do with the most cast-off, abject ingredients imaginable. Clamshells, painted green and strung with wire, become a constellation on one wall. The mystery hanging on another (a ritual object, a whip?) is a tree branch wrapped with black cloth tape and rubber.

Some recent pieces could be crude architectural maquettes, perhaps for an ancient amphitheater and a lunar lander. Others, built with Styrofoam, cement and screws, suggest complex abstract constructions that have been damaged by fire; they have craggy holes but are still solid.

And then there is the plain-spoken one on a pedestal: metal cans and bricks combined with slapdash concrete, a tiny empty liquor bottle at its side. Relics of the street outside? A model for a home? Like so much of Duff's art, it's ramshackle but quietly dignified. *ANDREW RUSSETH*

CHINATOWN

'Eruption'

Through Feb. 28. Jarvis Art, 96 Bowery; 929-320-9560, jarvis.art.

Sylvia Snowden, "Connie," 1978, acrylic and oil pastel on Masonite. via Sylvia Snowden and Jarvis Art, New York

Uniting thematically related material by canonical figures and ambitious up-and-comers is a well-worn group-show conceit. But “Eruption,” organized by the Jarvis Art gallery and the art dealer Max Werner, does it with finesse and surprise, its 18 pictures portraying human bodies marked by mixtures of anxiety, lust and freedom.

The elders include Neo-Expressionists like Francesco Clemente, Eric Fischl and Georg Baselitz, whose splotchy 2001 portrait of Joseph Stalin is enigmatic and upside-down. (A Baselitz quotation also provides the show’s title: “Art is visceral and vulgar; it’s an eruption.”)

But the most satisfying contribution is by the category-eluding octogenarian painter Sylvia Snowden, an oozing, smoldering 1978 near-abstraction from which two hands appear to be growing.

The young guns tend toward cooler, more restrained visions. (If they’re erupting, it’s inward.) Besuited men walk, downcast, through an eerie landscape in a Jan Eustachy Wolski work. Spectral people, here and not, populate wan paintings by Konstantina Krikzoni and Andrew Woolbright.

Alexandra Metcalf presents a femme fatale perched atop a couch, somehow merging with it, while a golden figure is camouflaged with the surrounding world in a beguiling 2026 painting by Osama Al Rayyan.

In a frightening Georgia Gardner Gray work, at least, a man is wailing, kneeling as he presses his hands together. Expressionism can provide catharsis, and this does, until you start wondering about the two men looming behind him. *ANDREW RUSSETH*

More to See

CHELSEA

‘Plein Air’

Through April 18. Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 West 22nd Street; 212-243-0200, matthewmarks.com.

Robert Gober, “Untitled” (2018-2025), aluminum, wood, paper, copper, epoxy putty, cast gypsum polymer, glass, pewter, charcoal, colored pencil, acrylic and oil paint, LED lights. Robert Gober, via Matthew Marks Gallery

The sculptor Robert Gober is known to distill the psychosexual verve of household objects like sinks and candles. This show combines Gober’s latest work with paintings by two members of the Pennsylvania Impressionists, a regional painting movement from the early 20th century.

A text by Gober notes that a photograph of this group “en plein air” depicts a grinning man carrying another on his shoulders; from that homosocial spark, he gathered paintings by these two friends, John Folinsbee (1892-1972) and Harry Leith-Ross (1886-1973). One painting, by Folinsbee, renders a snowy but plowed intersection with a decommissioned cannon seemingly blowing a hole in the town; another, by Leith-Ross, features a snow-draped cabin with an upholstered chair on the roof.

Gober contributes five shadow boxes from a continuing series; each built with metallic gray plywood and styled with surrealistic domestic details like stiffened French blinds with the pulls falling up or sconces shaped like leather shoes. Most have a tiny prison window set into the back wall. Realistically sculpted detritus like cigarette butts adds to the sense of peering through cracked windowpanes at the dingy, picaresque confinement of rural winter. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

NOLITA

Alison Nguyen

Through March 28. Storefront for Art and Architecture, 97 Kenmare Street; 212-431-5795, storefront.nyc.

Alison Nguyen, “Perforation, Ellipse V01” (2026), multichannel video, color, sound, glass screen, steel, casters, gold on aluminum, colored gels. via Alison Nguyen and Storefront for Art and Architecture; Photo by Dario Lasagni

Linking the multiple screens of Alison Nguyen’s disjointed video installation is a projection of a stark scene: an archer on a rooftop at dusk, sending arrows off camera. It suggests the threatening Surrealist notion of an artist firing blindly into a crowd. The rhythmic snick of the arrows seems to cue changes on the other screens.

This tension and release point to the disquiet underlying the other footage — choppy shots of workers killing time in a warehouse (from “Aisle 9,” a theatrical film by the artist) and recent clips of bolero songs in Vietnamese pulled from the internet. When the North Vietnamese government banned this decadent Western genre, bolero performances went underground; apparently, risk only concentrated their emotion. *TRAVIS DIEHL*

CHELSEA

Charles Atlas/Yasumasa Morimura

Through March 21. Luhring Augustine, 531 West 24th Street; 212-206-9100, luhringaugustine.com.

Charles Atlas, “Mirror,” 1991/2026, single-channel video with sound. Charles Atlas, via Luhring Augustine, New York

Playing in the back room of Luhring Augustine, behind the camp maximalism of Yasumasa Morimura’s huge photo self-portraits, is a mesmerizing reel of Charles Atlas videos that he has titled “Anamneses,” or “remembrances.” Accounting for edits and adjustments, its eight pieces date from 1972 to the present.

In one, the performance artist John Kelly removes false eyelashes and stage makeup while singing a beautiful aria from the Saint-Saëns opera “Samson and Delilah.” In another, Atlas himself adjusts a three-part dressing mirror, occasionally glancing into the camera. The choreographer Stanley Love, wearing a black shift and head wrap, dances movingly to Bette Midler’s “The Rose”; the performance artist Hapi Phace does an extravagant Liza Minnelli; Anne Iobst, of the performance duo Dancenoise, horses around with a blue foam roller wearing nothing but a bathing cap and heels.

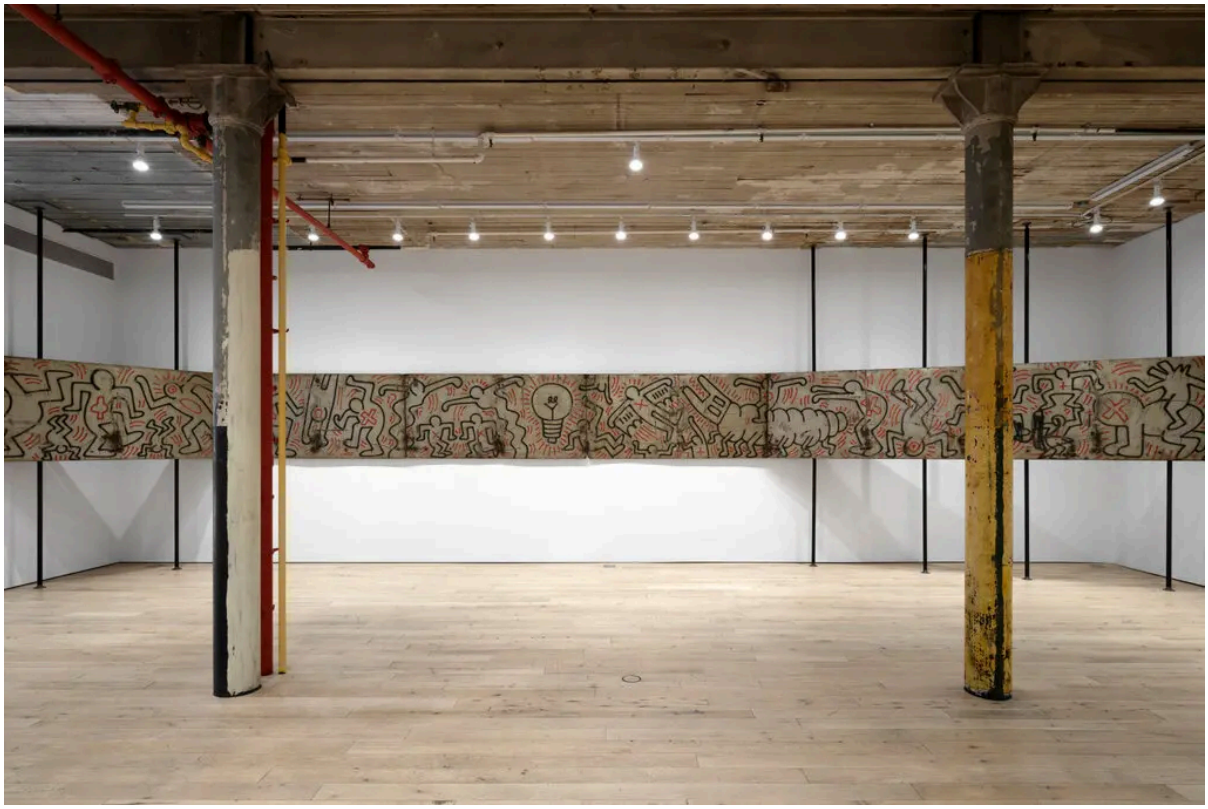
Altogether the videos are infused with an astonishing amount of emotion, some of it coming from the anguished context of the AIDS crisis. They’re also about gender, photography, irony, performance and creative expression. When Kelly, singing to himself in the mirror, turns a momentary glance on the viewer, it’s as neat a metaphor as I can imagine for what it is to be a self-reflective human being. It’s also a powerful reminder that artifice can be as vital and authentic a way of moving in the world as any other, and that we can have critical distance from our emotions or situations even while fully inhabiting them. In that way, the work is as urgent, and as topical, as ever. *WILL HEINRICH*

Closed

CHINATOWN

Keith Haring

Through Feb. 7. Martos Gallery, 41 Elizabeth Street; 212-560-0670, martosgallery.com.



Installation view of “Keith Haring: FDR Drive Mural.” via Martos Gallery; Photo by Steven Probert

In a time of ostentatious public art — Thomas Heatherwick’s vile “Vessel,” Anish Kapoor’s more endearing “beans” — Keith Haring’s approach represents a refreshing tonic. Working quickly and often spontaneously, he chalked drawings in New York subway stations and painted walls around the world, intent on delight.

In 1984, he sprayed a rollicking scene on 30 metal panels affixed to a fence in a Manhattan park along the East River, a roughly 300-foot-long mural visible from cars on the nearby Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive; 14 are now installed in a dazzler at the Martos Gallery.

Outlined in black, more than 50 of Haring’s trademark cartoon humans dance, flip, jump and fly (some sport wings, others pregnant bellies), accompanied by the odd dog, caterpillar or lightbulb. Everyone is going wild, and crisp red lines and squiggles punctuate their fluid movements. One figure is labeled “T.K.C.”: the photographer Tseng Kwong Chi, who documented many of Haring’s pursuits. (Tseng died in 1990, at 39, a few weeks after Haring did, at 31, both of AIDS-related illnesses.)

Haring made far more intricate works, but this punchy party seems apt for drivers cruising or crawling along the highway near East 91st Street (a stretch of road that would still benefit from charismatic art).

Inside a gallery today, the joyous picture registers also as a moving artifact. Removed in 1985 and now dispersed, its panels are scrapped and bear graffiti. “Angel + Lisa 104 St,” one addition reads. (Where are they now?) The critic and curator Bob Nickas notes in an accompanying essay that, after Haring saw the weathered work in 1989, he wrote in his journal that it was “in really bad shape, but somehow that makes it look even better.”

It’s a convivial artwork about the pleasures of being together in public, and so it would be ideal if a museum would snap up these panels and reunite them with their peers.
ANDREW RUSSETH

TRIBECA

Julia Rommel/Lucas Blalock

Through Feb. 21. Bureau, 112 Duane Street; 212-227-2783, bureau-inc.com.

From left, Julia Rommel, “Wine and Cheese, 2025,” oil on linen; Lucas Blalock, “F/D/u/a/n/n/e/c/r/I/a/n/l/g Shoes,” 2025, archival inkjet print; Julia Rommel, “Agency,” 2025, oil on linen. via Bureau, New York

Julia Rommel makes abstract paintings that feature flat blocks of color, occasional rows of staples and raised lines created when she remounts a canvas on a larger stretcher, moving what had been a corner to the painting’s front surface. Here and there she admits a cloud of expressive brushstrokes, but typically only within carefully delineated areas.

In their focus on the physical means and apparatus of their genre, in the faint quotation marks that hover around those expressive gestures and in their overall air of elegant, willful opacity, her paintings distinctly evoke photography — or at least they do when, as in this show, they're hung alongside photographs by Lucas Blalock. One of the paintings, "Studs," even made me think of the black of a Diane Arbus gelatin silver print.

Blalock, though, uses real objects — sometimes with the help of elaborate still lifes and sometimes simply with Photoshop — to make fascinating, gaudy, weirdly evocative images that refer to nothing but themselves. Working from a place of post-digital disillusionment, he understands the elastic mendacity of visual imagery, and he may keep you on your toes by titling a simple photograph of a sickle, say, "Hammer."

Generally, though, how he makes the images, or what he thinks about them, doesn't seem to be the point. In "Corncob," he sticks a sandal with shoelaces into a heavy glass with a grid pattern, and what catches and absorbs your attention isn't what it is, but how it appears. In that way, his photos look very much like painting — or at least, they do when they're hung alongside paintings by Julia Rommel. *WILL HEINRICH*

See the January gallery shows here.

A correction was made on Feb. 9, 2026*: An earlier version of this article misidentified an artist's surname. She is Georgia Gardner Gray, not Gray Gardner.*
