

# Art Gallery Shows to See in October

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By Jillian Steinhauer and Travis Diehl

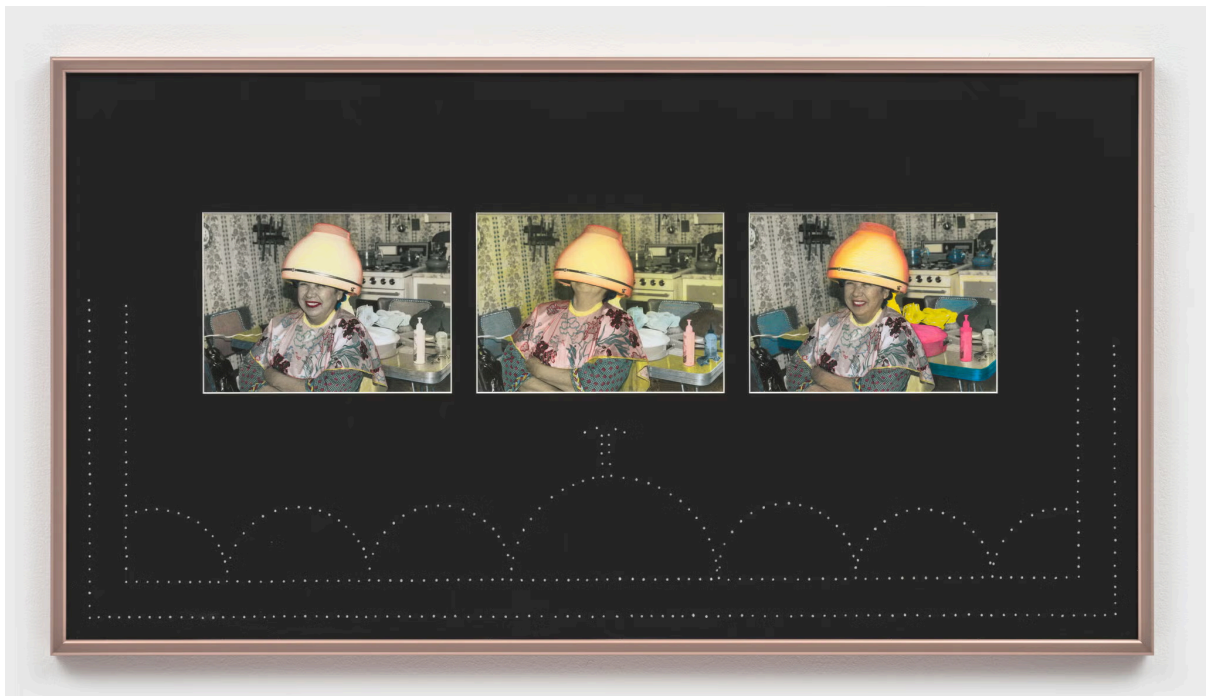
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*This week in Newly Reviewed, Jillian Steinhauer covers Melissa Joseph's casserole culture, Sarah Zapata's yarns and Shelley Niro's Native everywoman*

CHELSEA

## Shelley Niro

Through Oct. 31. Hales, 547 West 20th Street; 646-590-0776, [halesgallery.com](https://halesgallery.com).



Shelley Niro, “The Iroquois Is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society,” 1989/2026, three archival inkjet prints with colored-pencil additions, mounted on hand-drilled black mat board. Shelley Niro, via Hales, London and New York; Photo by JSP Art Photography

One of the works in Shelley Niro's solo show is a triptych featuring her mother. Three hand-colored photographs depict a woman smiling and laughing while she sits with her head in a salon-style hair dryer.

The pictures are embedded in a black mat board that also contains a hand-drilled abstract design. The title of the piece, "The Iroquois Is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society" (1991/2026), serves as a kind of punchline. Niro is honoring her mother, but the bland, ethnographic phrase sounds ridiculous compared with the vivacity of the images.

"The Iroquois" encapsulates many of the characteristics of Niro's practice. It demonstrates her use of serialized photographs, her conceptual pairing of image and text, her dry sense of humor and her focus on Native women as a subject. Niro, who is a member of the Turtle Clan of the Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) Nation, has been creating this type of work for decades, and it's the focus of the current exhibition (though she also makes paintings, beadwork and films).

The show is titled "In Her Lifetime," after an exceptional piece from 1992. It's composed of six photographs of Niro's sister, who stands in for a kind of Native everywoman, accompanied by a narrative text that deftly depicts an existential journey from the open-endedness of childhood to the depressing tedium of adulthood. Yet "In Her Lifetime" doesn't feel overly somber; Niro's light touch imparts a gentle ambiguity. This is one of her greatest strengths as an artist: illuminating realities that can be painful, but finding the playfulness and absurdity in them, too. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*

