

Kianja Strobert: when is brunch? at Art Omi



Installation view, Kianja Strobert, when is brunch?, Art Omi, Ghent, NY. Photo: Bryan Zimmerman.

Kianja Strobert: when is brunch?

Art Omi

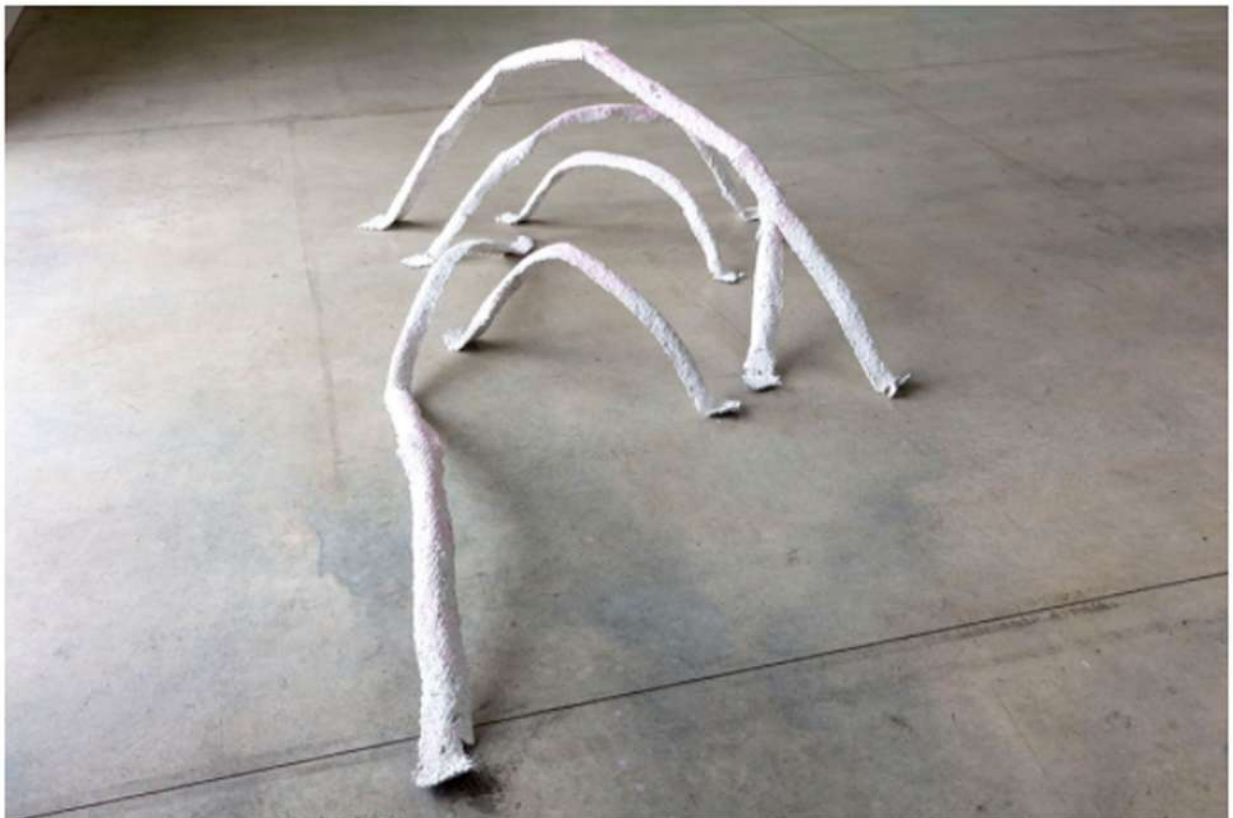
March 20 through May 16, 2021

By ROBERT R. SHANE, May 2021

If you were an archeologist living a few millennia from now unearthing the remains of our present-day consumerist society, your find might look a lot like Kianja Strobert's exhibition *when is brunch?*. The haphazard assemblage of painted papier mâché cookware and food, mass produced objects, and photographs all mounted on the walls of Art Omi's Newmark Gallery are revealed within clean rectangular borders, as if carefully excavated. One zone painted in grass green expressionist gestures titled *Factory* (all works 2021) extends the length of an entire wall; another titled *Lobster* wraps a corner. Composed of Pop colors and puffy textures, the discovered objects at first appear playful, and one could get lost in the visual hedonism the exhibition offers. However, we are also asked to take posterity's critical view of capitalism and its art by other pewter-colored objects, rough and ashen like the

charred remains of Pompeii, as well as a series of arcing bone-white structures on floor.

Fugue, the tallest mural in the exhibition, is shaped like a simple Neolithic home with two ladder-like structures propped against its small rectangular doorway. Colorful expressionist marks fill the background of this life-size architectural elevation host to an assemblage of objects handcrafted in papier mâché over metal lathe armatures. These includes rectangular pewter-colored troughs, filled with solidified paint in the colors of plastic Easter eggs; dinnerware, ladles, and flattened skillet; and food, including sticks of butter, a loaf of bread, and a halved grapefruit. The handmade objects find themselves surrounded by mass produced, plastic food replicas, such as a rubber orange branded with its company name and model number. Often wrapped in pearls, Stobert's citrus fruits reference 17th century *vanitas*. But whereas lemons and oranges in Dutch still lifes were tinged with decay and mold to remind viewers of their own mortality, Stobert's plastic fruit will never decompose, as our landfills and the oceans will attest to future archaeologists.



Kianja Stobert, Untitled Lines (detail), 2021. Papier mâché, metal lathe and paint. Dimensions variable. Art Omi, Ghent, NY. Photo: Bryan Zimmerman.

A series of three-dimensional *Untitled Lines* on the floor also provides subtle reminders of mortality. Sculpted in papier mâché and lathe like the wall objects but left white—only a few have sparse washes of color, as if weathered over time—they read as bones crawling across the floor, often in groupings like small families. Sensitive to the space, these bones are not only *memento mori*, but ancestral guides moving us through the exhibition. We follow one linear grouping in a spirited rhythm, rising and falling, along two walls and a corner.

Shane, Robert. "Kianja Stobert: when is brunch? at Art Omi", *Whitehot Magazine*, May, 2021

Above them, three peach and periwinkle paintings and two pewter troughs hang in a row like portraits on the wall. The arcing expressionist lines in the paintings resonate with the sculptures below. One trough, *Pewter Trough* is filled, while *Sunset Trough* is empty save for a photograph of a sailboat at sunset buckling in its corner. Both pewter troughs face us like silvered mirrors too dull to reflect anymore. If they reflect anything, perhaps it is our own emptiness.

Collaged in the center of each of the three paintings, simply titled *1*, *2*, and *3*, is a photograph reproduced on printer paper. It shows a Black woman's hands while she plays piano. This photograph also appeared three times in *Fugue*—echoing the three simultaneous voices of the work's namesake musical form. Here, separated from the *Fugue*'s cacophonous melee of objects, the photograph slows us down. Its quality nostalgically recalls a 1980s family snapshot: warm tones, fuzzy detail, light from a camera-mounted flash. The woman's fingers, one donning a wedding band, rest tenderly on the keys a moment before depressing them. Through this tenderness we feel not only the pianist's love of playing, but the love the photographer had for her and her music.

Throughout *when is brunch?*, touch—and the possibility of tenderness it brings—is a tactic for preserving a sense of emotional and sensory intimacy amidst a consumerist society that seems impossible to escape. Unlike forms of Pop art that cynically replicate consumer culture—what Donald Kuspit has critically called “capitalist art about capitalism”—Strobert transforms the products of capitalist society, such as materials off the shelf from big box hardware stores, into poignant visual, tactile, and kinesthetic experiences. The archaeological and nostalgic perspective of the exhibition takes us to the end of our civilization as it comments on mass production, waste, and consumption, but Strobert also offers life-affirming resistance to it. **WM**

Subversive Methods: Kianja Strobert at the Studio Museum in Harlem

by William Corwin

Kianja Strobert: Of This Day In Time at The Studio Museum in Harlem

November 13, 2014 through March 8, 2015

144 West 125th Street (between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Malcolm X boulevards)

New York, 212 864 4500



Installation view: "Kianja Strobert: Of This Day in Time," The Studio Museum in Harlem, November 13, 2014–March 8, 2015. Photo: Adam Reich.

"Of This Day in Time," at the Studio Museum in Harlem through March 8, 2015, is the first major New York exhibition of the work of artist Kianja Strobert. In the tradition of Klein and Dubuffet, Strobert chooses to site her artistic practice within the confines of painting, while literally doing everything she can to reconfigure that discipline through a re-orientation of mediums and with an expressionistic yet pragmatic eye.



Kianja Strobert, *Untitled*, 2010. Graphite, enamel, pumice, bone and watercolor on paper, 50 × 38 inches. Collection of Erika Klauer. Photo: Adam Reich.

Like a passage from Aeschylus, Strobert's *Untitled* (2010) is a raw and epic cartography of emotion and a historical narrative. The composition is simple enough: a cloudburst of silvers, whites and grays, which is decadent in its simplicity, like the old Bourbon flag of pure white. Applied to the bottom left quadrant, four gold-painted chicken bones embody the artist's fascination with the "realness" of her media — the idea of expanding her stable of materials to the unexpected and atypical, including crumbled pumice stone, fruit skin, and in this piece, bones. In the face of the silver and white, the golden bones — one is green with gold highlights, seemingly in imitation of the gilded bronze of a classical cast — are suggestive of a reliquary. The whole assemblage speaks of ritual, art of immediate necessity rather than quiet pondering or decoration.

Strobert's painting isn't abstract painting but the abstraction of painting. She is on a search for its origins; painting as practical magic, the prosaic made ecstatic, and self-portrait in its most basic sense as a trace of its author. Many of the works bear the insignia of the artist herself, the above-mentioned *Untitled* (2010) departs from its opulent palette with two red fingerprints — a pair of red dots in a rectangle at the lower right hand corner that stand in as signature, blood contract or even eyes. A series of four paintings, all *Untitled* (each 2011), follows the format of enclosing yellow border; upper quadrant, or sky, of graphite dust; and a lower half of mostly brown, orange and ochre blots and smudges. Many of the active forms at bottom are marks made with the artist's hands — finger streaks and thick, blobby prints. Beyond the literal application of paint, the strokes and gestures are at odds with the brush or pen. In this series of paintings the careful, regulating geometry of the precise and crisp straight-edge border, and the repeated texture and ordering of the colors is at odds with the spontaneity of the gesture, merging the genres of abstract landscape, diagram and portrait.

Archaism and Ecstasy (2014) and *Taurus II* (2014) employ alternative methods to subvert the artist's tools: the gestures have a troweled-on quality, the strokes again have the singular nature of a finger motion, but almost as if the artist were a giant. The motions are smooth. But, bulked up with the pumice or some other filler material, the gestures are accretive and encrusted: artful while distancing themselves from the smooth artificiality of the brush, but not necessarily jettisoning its delicacy or poise as an instrument.

Corwin, Williams. "Subversive Methods: Kianja Strobert at the Studio Museum in Harlem." *Artcritical.com*, March 2015.



Kianja Strobert, *Untitled*, 2011. Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 inches. Collection of Zach Feuer.

Often the use of a base — canvas, linen, or in this case, paper — seems so inevitable as to be arbitrary. It falls into a preordained hierarchy, i.e. paper for drawings and canvas for painting; here all paintings are on paper, and the choice is steadfastly self-conscious. Strobert chooses paper in order to torture the substrate, to watch it suffer as with each coating of acrylic, oil and matte-medium-infused pumice dust, the thick watercolor paper strains with the weight and buckles under the varying constraints of mediums that contract to differing degrees as they dry. This is paper that is not allowed to be an indifferent and neutral foundation and it begs the question of why we assume the substrate in a painting must be flat and indifferent to its various layers and coatings. The same holds true for the mediums themselves. The non-traditional materials Strobert employs — powdered graphite, pumice, papier-mâché and glitter among others — all have visual signatures as distinctive as the bulbous shine of oil paint or the transparent skeins of gouache. They very literally represent an earthier side of image making that enlists the grit and sparkle that exists in minerals, dirt and flesh, but that somehow crosses the line of acceptable representation. Strobert's work inhabits a region outside of the neat requirements of traditional painting, and though her work is across the board contained in perfect box frames, ironically these only serve to reinforce the unpredictability of her use of medium.

Corwin, Williams. "Subversive Methods: Kianja Strobert at the Studio Museum in Harlem." *Artcritical.com*, March 2015.

OBSERVER

ON VIEW

Owning the Abstract: Kianja Strobert Taunts, and Sometimes Tops, Her Ab-Ex Ancestors

By Ryan Steadman | 02/18/15 9:30am



Kianja Strobert, *Untitled*, 2011
(Photo courtesy: Collection of Sam, Shanit and Alexys Schwartz)

Kianja Strobert's first solo museum retrospective, in Santa Monica two years ago, was aptly titled "Nothing To Do But Keep Going."

Born in 1980, the fast-rising New York artist has been showing her work nearly constantly, and around the world, for the past decade. And while she's also been exhibited at art fairs by such noted dealers as Jack Tilton and Zach Feuer, she's managed to avoid being lumped in with a group of artists often described as "art-fair artists."

Steadman, Ryan. "Owning the Abstract: Kianja Strobert Taunts, and Sometimes Tops, her Ab-Ex Ancestors." *The Observer*, February 2015.

So, in a sea of gifted 30-something painters, what, other than the always helpful Yale MFA, sets her apart? A look at her vibrant Abstractions on paper, now on view at the Studio Museum through March 8, answer those questions with a series of refreshing rib-jabs that take on the gravitas of Abstract Expressionism with the potent one-two punch of reverence and personal creativity.

Ms. Strobert, given her academic pedigree that also includes Cooper Union, is far from an outsider when it comes to the art world, but as an African-American woman working in the vein of Abstraction, she is keenly aware that she's treading on turf that has been historically monopolized by white male artists. It's a tension that Ms. Strobert has adroitly harnessed within this impeccable group of recent paintings.

Born and raised in the birthplace of Ab-Ex, Ms. Strobert puts her fluency in 20th century art to good use. She has deftly enmeshed palettes and compositions from New York School greats like Joan Mitchell, Philip Guston, and Franz Kline to create a unique mix of vibrant and earthy colors that shimmy across her paper surfaces. Her touch with a brush allows her to make a variety of exuberant marks that seem to dance with unique and energetic ebullience.

These tools alone would amount to an adequate skill set for someone wanting to forge a nice career as a painter, but the artist pushes her work beyond that. She quietly but persistently embellishes her paintings so that they start to feel like sophisticated, even radiant, cartoons of Abstract paintings.

Working on a humble scale (between 50 inches and 30 inches high) enables Ms. Strobert to exaggerate the formal aspects of her paintings, many of which begin to resemble delirious yet approachable maquettes of Ab-Ex grandiosities. Her heavy paint application (a calling card for all types of Expressionism) is amplified to a caulky thickness with a variety of additives, forcing her loud colors to literally jump off the page. String, paper pulp and even chicken bones are all used to comically beef up these surfaces. Another technique nuttily reaffirms the "artiness" of many of these abstract paintings: a neatly painted outer edge that boldly encases/frames Strobert's messy paint marks.

Not limited to pure Abstraction, recognizable imagery often seeps into her oeuvre. Some of her overloaded papers, such as *Untitled*, 2011, are emblazoned with stark brown or red hand prints that walk the line between crude humor and protest. They add an aspect of literalness, one that seems to wordlessly taunt the guttural urgency of much mid-century Abstraction.

Ms. Strobert delves even further into the realm of visual metaphor with a rough grouping of yellow dollar signs in the luminous painting, *...all these bright ideas*, 2013. These barely legible ciphers (which perhaps emphasize the love/hate relationship between money and art) feel effortlessly integrated into her tightly wrought composition. Adding this element of mock Twombly-esque symbolism to this vivid balance of grays, pinks and blues works surprisingly well, while also opening up new avenues for Ms. Strobert to navigate. It is exactly this kind of thirst for experimentation that keeps this artist's output fresh and evolving.

Talent is what lifts Ms. Strobert's work above parody, but her ability to come to terms with all aspects of the Ab-Ex movement is what makes it a beautiful and earnest example of contemporary Abstraction. She has done what many Abstract artists before her have failed to do by transforming the tradition—owning it in a way—and making it new.



Kianja Strobert

b. 1980, New York, NY

Lives and works in Hudson, NY

Kianja Strobert engages the language and history of twentieth-century painting while working against many of the ideas associated with it. For example, Strobert is uninterested in monumentality or the totalizing language of the “masterpiece,” as embraced by abstraction of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Rather, she methodically and repetitively works through the materiality of paint, experimenting with gesture, texture and color as inherent yet malleable conditions of the medium. In her newer series of works, swirls of warm reds and oranges layer and intermingle with swaths of muted gray. In one work, quick daubs of expressionist strokes contrast with a straight, narrow line that cuts a vertical swath through the paint, not unlike the famous “zips” of painter Barnett Newman. In another, Strobert isolates splotches of color on the paper, where they faintly resemble numbers or letters, echoes of Jasper Johns’s representations of signage. Despite the absence of figuration, Strobert’s hand and gesture are palpable, revealing physicality embedded in the textured surface. Seen in tandem, the paintings are meant to work as experimental serial variations that provide an increased focus on materials. (AS)

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

Racial Redefinition in Progress 'Fore' at Studio Museum in Harlem

By HOLLAND COTTER NOV. 29, 2012

In 2001 the Studio Museum in Harlem opened a group exhibition called “Freestyle,” the first in what would be a series intended to introduce freshly minted African-American talent. And in the catalog for that show the curator, Thelma Golden, dropped a neat little cultural bomb. She referred to the group of artists she’d chosen, most of them then in their 20s, as “post-black.”

Heads spun, and are still spinning. Artists of an older generation, particularly those deeply invested in lifelong issues of black pride, were angry. The handle-hungry art market was flummoxed, unsure of how to capitalize on the label.

Even some young artists to whom it was applied weren’t quite clear about what to do with it. Overnight the dynamics of contemporary art changed.

Although little noted in the midst of the uproar at the time, Ms. Golden herself held the term “post-black” at a critical distance, floating it out as a proposition rather than advancing it as a polemic. For her it meant artists who were adamant about not being confined to the category of “black,” though, as she wrote, “their work was deeply interested in redefining complex notions of blackness. Post-black,” she added with a wry twist, “was the new black.”

Cotter, Holland. “Racial Redefinition in Progress: ‘Fore’ at the Studio Museum in Harlem.” *The New York Times*, November 2012.

More than a decade later it still is, to judge by the fourth and latest of the museum's new-generation shows, this one titled "Fore," organized by three young staff curators, Lauren Haynes, Naima J. Keith and Thomas J. Lax. Like its predecessors it keeps racial politics alive but discreet and covers the waterfront in terms of mediums, which it samples and mixes with turntablist flair.

In line with current New York trends, painting gets major attention. Three smallish portraits by Jennifer Packer (born 1985; Yale M.F.A. 2012) of art-school friends kick things off. They're traditional looking and beautiful, their suave brushwork finessed with a palette knife. Portraits by another artist, Toyin Odutola, who was born in Nigeria and now lives in Los Angeles, are more offbeat and generate interesting ideas. Ms. Odutola makes her sitters so black that their forms read like solid, featureless silhouettes from across a room. Only up close do you see that their eyes are wide open, and their skin is a porous weave of ropy ink lines, with rainbow color glinting through like light from behind.

Another Los Angeles artist, Kenyatta A. C. Hinkle, uses images from colonial-era postcards, made for European eyes, to make a point about the vulnerability of the body when seen through a racial lens. In her paint-altered version of the original cards, nude and seminude "native" women from West Africa are under assault from swarming lines of white pigment that bring to mind flames, microbes and spermatozoa.

Then the figure vanishes. It's just a shadowy smudge on an abstract gold field in a diptych by Noah Davis, and absent altogether in abstract paintings by Kianja Strobert, Sienna Shields and Brenna Youngblood.

Ms. Youngblood looks particularly impressive here. She has, however temporarily, exchanged her complicated, object-laden painting mode of a few years ago for a near-Minimalist austerity. But nothing she does is simple. One 2012 picture in the show consists primarily of a plain white unmarked panel, yet the addition of a small scrap of stuck-on signage keeps her art in painting-plus-something-else terrain.

And "something else" in this show covers a lot of ground. What conventional formal category, or categories, can describe Harold Mendez's filmy, soot-black

Veronica veils made from dryer sheets, ink and fabric softener? Or Cullen Washington Jr.'s "Caped Crusader," with its collaged black baby superhero anchored to the floor by a T-Mobile sign? Or Eric Nathaniel Mack's "Honey Hollow," consisting of nothing more than a paint-brushed blanket hanging loose on the wall and stirred by the breeze from a nearby fan?

Unprepossessing to the eye, it does a lot of conceptual hard work, mashing together the essences of painting, sculpture and kinetic installation. Depending on who's looking, the piece is either barely there, or a sly celebration of material movement in space, of performance art without bodies.

Performance art has a significant place in "Fore," as it does in the local art world these days, with blackness weaving in and out of it. It's hard to locate in a choreographically executed wall drawing by Taisha Paggett, but forms the troubled heart of a two-channel video by Nicole Miller.

On one screen Ms. Miller appears, coached by a white ballet instructor in a pristine studio as she practices classical barre exercises she learned as a child. On the other screen a group of young black woman, with men hovering, rehearse a sexually explicit form of Caribbean popular dance called daggering in a murky Brooklyn nightclub. The piece asks: Is there a connection between the two scenes? Yes. And what's the connection? No answer.

Quite different in spirit, though in its way no less inquiring, is a video called "Reifying Desire: Model It," by the speedily emerging young artist Jacolby Satterwhite. The piece was made for the show and connects whole cultural worlds.

Mr. Satterwhite is its star, and a natural one. Resplendent in spandex suits and sequined wraps, he vogues up a storm in one digitally enhanced setting after another. But the dance sequences are just one part of an exercise in multimedia maximalism that encompasses fashion, Dada, the Home Shopping Network, Sun Ra, CVS pharmacy chic and highly specialized household appliances designed by Patricia Satterwhite — the artist's mother and collaborator — who calls on art to keep schizophrenia at bay.

Mr. Satterwhite will be doing his complex thing, live, in a two-part performance

art program that the museum will roll out in December and February, events that give several other artists a chance to extend their range beyond what the galleries can hold.

Steffani Jemison — one of the museum's 2012-13 artists in residence along with Ms. Packer and Mr. Washington — will present a text piece based on urban street fiction of a kind sold in the neighborhood around the museum. The polymathic artist named Narcissister will offer staged equivalents of her gender-bending photo-collages in the show. Jamal Cyrus, from Houston, will deep-fry a tenor saxophone. And Kevin Beasley, whose faintly sinister, bundle-like sculptures sit on the floor here and there, will introduce an immersive sound environment, to which no one will be admitted late and from which no one will be allowed to leave early.

An environment of a different kind, Abigail DeVille's "Haarlem Tower of Babel," is already in place in the museum's open-air courtyard. Assembled by Ms. DeVille from locally scavenged objects and materials (shopping carts, bottles, trash bags) and memorabilia from her grandmother's Bronx apartment, the piece speaks of life on the street, generational bonds, confusion, dispossession and not-having as a chronic, punishing but toughening condition.

These were themes often tackled by African-American artists in the past, including by some of those who founded the Studio Museum in Harlem in the 1960s. And the themes remain relevant now, when the country is coming out of a presidential election shot through with racism, when African-American citizens are being hit disproportionately by a brutal economy, and when the art world, despite the multicultural surges of the recent past, still has scant room for black artists, black anything.

In the circumstances post-black feels like an iffy and unrealistic proposition. Yet it can work. Without identifying itself as "black art," Ms. DeVille's installation brings hard, pertinent existential politics into the museum. And so, in less monumental ways, does other art in "Fore," simply by bearing the clear, proud influence of older artists, living and gone, black and not. Romare Bearden and Robert Rauschenberg are among them. So are David Hammons and the other artists in "Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980" at MoMA PS1. Some of the artists took part in the

Studio Museum's three previous important post-black shows.

The young artists in "Fore" take something from all of these forebears but do something to and with it: reshape it, update it, understate it; conceptualize it, magnify or shrink it; and, increasingly it seems, cut it loose from labels. The point is that the something is always there, ready to be passed on, being passed on, no "post" about it.

Correction: December 1, 2012

An art review on Friday about "Fore," at the Studio Museum in Harlem, misspelled the given name of one of the museum's artists in residence, who will present a text piece based on urban street fiction. She is Steffani Jemison, not Stefanni.

Correction: December 4, 2012

A picture on Friday with an art review of "Fore" at the Studio Museum in Harlem, using information from the museum, was published in error and the artwork shown was also misidentified. The work, which is not in the show, is "Invisible Men: Beyond the Veil," by Abigail DeVille; the picture was not of her work "Haarlem Tower of Babel," which is part of the exhibition.

"Fore" continues through March 10 at the Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 West 125th Street; (212) 864-4500, studiomuseum.org.

A version of this review appears in print on November 30, 2012, on Page C23 of the New York edition with the headline: Racial Redefinition in Progress.

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"Grass Grows by Itself"

The spiritual is the focus of this multigenerational group show.

By Paul Laster Mon Aug 16 2010



Time Out Ratings :



Inspired by the Zen proverb "sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself," independent curator Sima Familant has assembled a group exhibition that links artworks of a spiritual nature across distant generations and a variety of media into a dynamic display. With 18 artists spread over the two floors of Marlborough's stylish, Richard Gluckman--designed Chelsea space, Familant constructs a poetic show that reveals unexpected relationships in the way the pieces are hung. Wade Guyton's stainless steel sculpture of an elongated letter *U* plays off Jim Hodges's gold-leaf drawing of a fractured tree, Mark Bradford's street-poster collages of sundry signs riff off Conceptual word works by his former professor Daniel Joseph Martinez, and Cameron Martin's nearly monochromatic landscape painting complements Carmen Herrera's minimally marked canvases.

A highlight of the show is recent Yale M.F.A. grad Kianja Strobert's wall of 15 abstract works on paper—equivalent to a solo show in a smaller gallery—that deftly mixes media and art-historical references, such as Barnett Newman's zips and Jasper Johns's handprints, to engaging ends. Another standout is Robert Zungu, who exhibits four completely different works—two representational sculptures, including one of several precariously stacked and blackened flour bags; a photograph of a curious display in an outsider artist's studio; and a mixed-media drawing, made from tawdry materials, that conveys a sense of healing. Meanwhile, Leigh Ruple scores big with a single, abstract painting of a figure in a watery realm threatened by a snake, which ironically could have risen from the show's metaphorical grass.

[Marlborough Chelsea](#), through Sept 9