

ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER, MARTHA SCHWENDENER and WILL HEINRICH MARCH 7, 2018

Mildred Thompson

Through March 31. Galerie Lelong & Co., 528 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-315-0470, galerielelong.com.

Mildred Thompson (1936-2003) graduated from Howard University in 1957, went on to study at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School, and had an early start to a strong career when the Museum of Modern Art bought two of her prints. Trips to Europe, however, convinced her that, for a black female artist, living and working there would be far more comfortable than in New York. So she returned to Germany and spent a productive decade there, exhibiting often. (She later traveled to Africa and the Middle East.) In 1974, an artist-in-residence grant brought her back to the United States. In 1985, she settled in Atlanta, painting and teaching to the end of her life.

She was right about sizing up her opportunities in New York. It's taken six decades to have a first solo show here, but what a sparkler it is. Thompson's formal range was wide, embracing painting, sculpture and electronic music composition. So were her intellectual interests, which along with art history, included physics, astronomy and theosophy. There's evidence of all these disciplines in the show made up of abstract paintings and drawings, most from two 1990s series titled "Magnetic Fields" and "Radiation Explorations."

Each of the series is color-keyed. In the “Magnetic Fields” paintings and pastels, molten yellow forms an all-over ground for funnel-like swirls of red lines and fusillades of pink and lavender. The larger, horizontally oriented “Radiation Exploration” pictures are based on fields of sea-blue over which burst the equivalent of cosmic fireworks: lightning bolts, planetary fireballs and meteor showers of individual strokes. It’s a chaos that doesn’t feel chaotic. It’s a spontaneously choreographed and completely controlled dance to the music of the spheres.

In short, this is beautiful, upbeat work, backed up by an entire creative history yet to be fully explored. And it arrives at a moment of long-delayed acknowledgment of abstract art by African-American women. A Howardena Pindell retrospective recently opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. And in Chelsea, along with the Thompson show — which comes with an excellent catalog by the art historians Lowery Stokes Sims and Melissa Messina — there’s a solo exhibition of paintings and collages by the New York City artist Nanette Carter. It’s at Skoto Gallery, and not to be missed.

HOLLAND COTTER

Edith Schloss

Through March 30. Meredith Ward Fine Art, 44 East 74th Street, Suite G, Manhattan; 212-744-7306, meredithwardfineart.com.

This show brings the painter Edith Schloss (1919-2011) one step closer to the small but definite niche that is her due. Following a larger, somewhat confusing retrospective at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in 2015, this show, “By the Sea,” zeros in on her best work: a group of small, delightful still lifes from the 1960s and ’70s. They were made in Italy, to which Schloss decamped for good in 1964, after about 18 years of marriage to the photographer/filmmaker Rudy Burckhardt and active participation in the nascent downtown New York art scene.

These paintings make good on Schloss’s longtime interest in still life, partly by taking cues from the painters Cy Twombly and Giorgio Morandi, both of whom she knew in Italy. The canvases feature a set cast of vases, pitchers and occasional toys (her son’s) that Schloss was never without, even when traveling. She would fill the vessels with blooms — thick circles in hearty shades of blue, orange or red balanced by whites and pinks and sometimes by patches of bare canvas. Especially in paintings from 1967 and ’68 titled “Rignalla” and “On the Ledge” from 1976, she lines up the vases on a high horizon, giving them a personable lean and

monumental scale reminiscent of Philip Guston's late works. In others, the bouquets line the bottom edge of the canvas or paper, as if on a windowsill overlooking a beach or the sea stretching beyond. At this point in her life, Schloss painted with consummate ease and abundant charm, sketching in her subjects and then applying color as needed. But don't be fooled. Her best works are primers on the shortest route to a good, original painting.

ROBERTA SMITH

Thomas Demand

Through April 7. Matthew Marks, 523 West 24th Street, Manhattan; 212-243-0200, matthewmarks.com.

Thomas Demand is a hybrid photographer. He trained as a sculptor and is best known for making cardboard and paper models of momentous events and politically charged sites — the meager kitchen in Saddam Hussein's last hide-out in Iraq or the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan — and photographing them to look deceptively realistic. In his current show at Matthew Marks, however, Mr. Demand shifts his primary focus to recreating photographs taken with his cellphone.

In the front gallery the walls are covered with gray wallpaper depicting school or workplace lockers (overtones, perhaps inadvertently, of American school shootings). Two videos shown on monitors suspended from the ceiling and a handful of photographs reproduce saccharine or banal subjects that Mr. Demand photographed with his cellphone: a red bow tied to a fence; a box with electrical wiring; blinking stoplights and balloons attached to a plastic clip. In the rear gallery are three large photographs in Mr. Demand's recognizable style, depicting the ruins of an unidentified bombardment, the interior of a barracks tent and the warmly lit workshop of a Bavarian violin maker — all near-perfectly sculpted in cardboard and paper and photographed.

The cellphone-derived works, titled "Dailies," are not as dramatic or captivating as the historical scenes. And yet, they accurately depict the present, merging Mr. Demand's anesthetized aesthetic with a world in which people are attached to their smartphones, capturing images they will never look at again. In this sense, Mr. Demand memorializes the banal and the forgotten with the same painstaking care he gives to more charged moments in history and suffuses the "Dailies" with an uncanny absurdity and pathos.

