

4 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Julie Mehretu's vibrant colors; Minjung Kim's gray and black ink paintings; Jean Katambayi Mukendi's "Quarantaine" drawings; and Bosco Sodi's clay spheres.

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Julie Mehretu

Through Dec. 23. Marian Goodman, 24 West 57th Street, Manhattan, (212) 977-7160, mariangoodman.com.

Julie Mehretu's work has grown steadily stronger, especially over the last few years. It helped to eliminate the fussy layers of finely drawn architectural elevations, planning grids and weather maps that cramped her large canvases' style, scale and apocalyptic mood, and to work more loosely by hand. This much was evident in the largely grisaille efforts in her 2016 show at Marian Goodman, where a new softness of line prevailed. It's even more apparent in "about the space of half an hour," her latest show at the gallery, whose title, from the Book of Revelation, refers to the short silence between the breaking of the Seventh Seal and God's unleashing of the Final Judgment.

Now Ms. Mehretu has taken on color again, releasing strands of red and blue among the ominous lights and shadows of the series of seven vertical paintings (2019-20) that give the show its title. Made primarily with an airbrush, they seem like feats of skill, or the skillful backgrounds of Photo-realist paintings. When the clouds and colorful marks build up, they're more convincing — as paintings and as ominous tumult. This occurs in the fourth and fifth works in the series and also in a precursor, "Rise (Charlottesville)," from 2018-19. Suffice to say that intimations of revelation and violence, not to mention the chaos of American politics, all seem equally present. But the best paintings are several horizontal canvases that use the

most color and the greatest number of techniques (including silk-screen and stenciling). Ms. Mehretu always seemed a bit nervous about actually making paintings as opposed to large drawings. Not any more.

ROBERTA SMITH



Minjung Kim's "Timeless," from 2019, mixed media on mulberry hanji paper. Minjung Kim

Minjung Kim

Through Feb. 28 (by appointment). Hill Art Foundation, 239 10th Avenue, Manhattan; 212-337-4455, hillartfoundation.org.

“People of refinement have a disinclination to colors,” Goethe argued in an 1810 treatise on chromatic perception. That’s as good a justification as any for the three shows, all excellent, quite unlike, staged so far at this private foundation. Last year we saw the paintings and photography of Christopher Wool (black, white, gray) and the sculptures of Charles Ray (silver, aluminum); now the Hill turns to Minjung Kim, a South Korean artist whose painstaking, profoundly beautiful ink paintings deploy, in the main, a muffled palette of grays and blacks.

On large sheets of pulpy hanji paper, Ms. Kim obtains delicate tonal shifts through variable saturations of ink and water, as in her “Mountain” series, whose careful gradations of blacks suggest receding hills or waves. Yet many of her “paintings” could be termed collages: She layers strips of the hanji paper (made from mulberry bark) in parallel lines or circular cutouts, then paints over the ridged and roughened surfaces. Frequently the paper shapes are several sheets deep. Usually the edges have been singed with a flame. The layering and burning give the rippling blacks a suggestion of three dimensions, and make these denuded paintings/collages feel almost like bas-reliefs.

There’s actually a little color in this show: Ms. Kim paints some mountainscapes in monochrome red or blue, and also one strange, earlier work of multicolored circles stands out like Skittles in a pile of coal. But her most powerful paintings, sedulous and silent, arise from the plain tools of black ink, water, paper and fire. You could map a lineage for these works stretching from Chinese literati painting, through modernist Western abstraction, to the nonobjective Korean painting movement called Dansaekhwa (Ms. Kim studied with Park Seo-bo, a Dansaekhwa superstar). But influences take a back seat here to the slow, deliberate act of painting, and the paradox of creation in nihility.

JASON FARAGO



Installation view of “Bosco Sodi: Perfect Bodies” at Perfect Bodies Auto Collision in Brooklyn. Bosco Sodi and Kasmin Gallery; Christopher Stach

Bosco Sodi

Through Jan. 3. 184-186 Conover Street, Brooklyn; Saturdays and Sundays; for hours and appointments, contact pioneerworks.org.

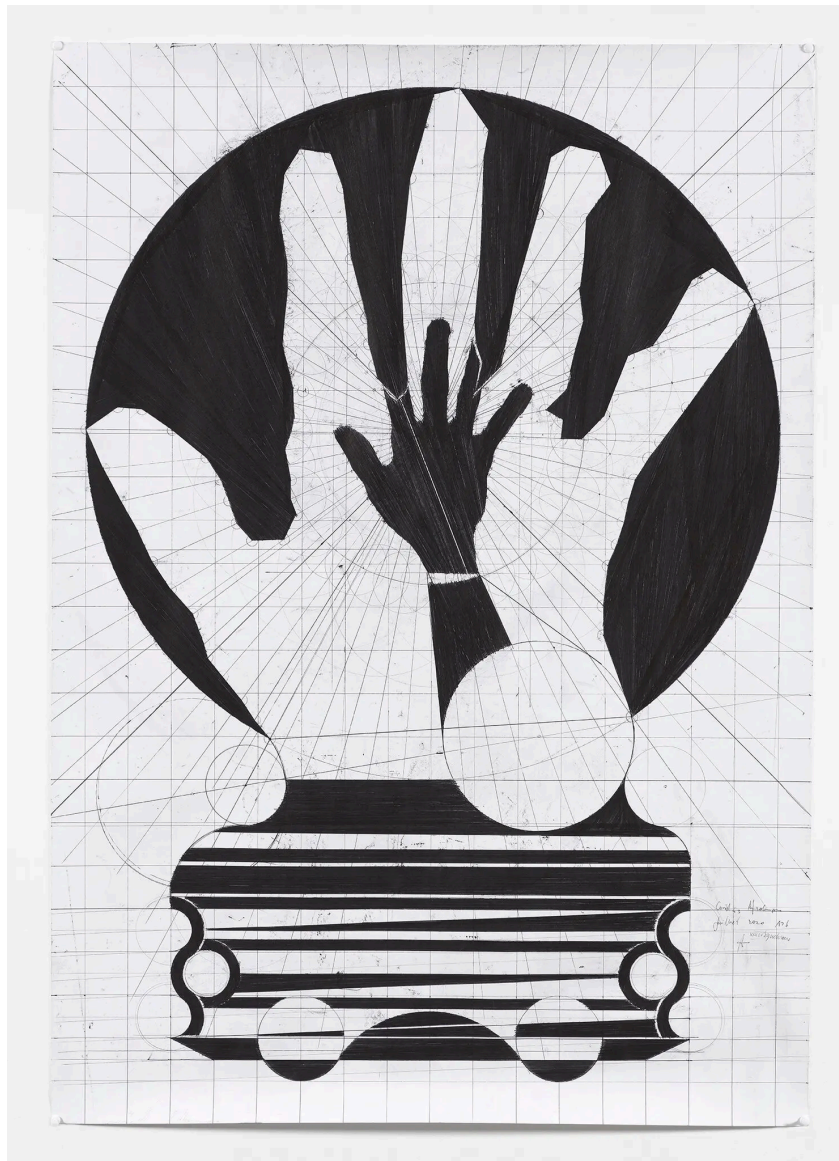
Only the sign survives from Perfect Bodies, a defunct auto body shop near the Red Hook waterfront in Brooklyn, part of an industrial site awaiting redevelopment. This fall, the sculptor Bosco Sodi, whose studio is nearby, borrowed the lot, and also the name, for his installation of more than two dozen rust-colored clay spheres that transform the space from something scruffy and marginal to a source of mysterious, ancient energy.

The orbs, of different sizes, are from the Oaxaca region, where Mr. Sodi, who is Mexican, has built a beachfront artists’ retreat; there, he dried them for months in open air before firing them in a traditional brick kiln. Perfectly imperfect, the

spheres — and three cuboids made the same way, placed in the lot's corners — are uneven, blistered, sometimes cracked, the natural results of the process that the artist embraces.

Brought by truck to Red Hook — where the installation is presented by Pioneer Works and curated by Dakin Hart, of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation — Mr. Sodi's elemental objects lurk, glower, or bask, depending on the light, the weather, and the visitor's imagination. Free to view this weekend and then by appointment until Jan. 3 — a good outdoor urban destination in pandemic times — they inspire by their indeterminacy, their acceptance and their beauty.

SIDDHARTHA MITTER



Jean Katambayi Mukendi

Through Jan. 30. Ramiken, 154 Scott Avenue, Brooklyn; (917) 434-4245, ramikencrucible.com.

Jean Katambayi Mukendi was supposed to have a residency at Ramiken Gallery in Brooklyn this year. He would have made intricate constructions of colored paper and wire, shellacked assemblages of everyday objects, or other such ingenious objects too unwieldy to have shipped from his home in Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The residency, of course, had to be pushed back. But the show it was meant to culminate in is going on because the artist sent over 40 large drawings that the gallery made into a powerful presentation simply by choosing a dozen and hanging them in a row. ("Quarantaine," the show's title, means "about 40" in French.)

Mr. Mukendi is a man of philosophical temperament with training as an electrical engineer, and the drawings are from his "Afrolampe" series of fantasy light bulb designs. In reproduction, they may look like inky silhouettes, but their solid shapes are built up one laborious black ballpoint line at a time. From close up, they exhibit a sticky, glimmering striation.

Despite its buoyant, almost giddy energy, the series makes a serious point. Lubumbashi is a mining town rich in esoteric minerals, but its citizens have vastly unequal access to the kinds of technology, like high-efficiency light bulbs, that their extracted wealth is used to produce. As a political or economic problem, this one is as firmly rooted as they get: Overcoming it demands imagination.

WILL HEINRICH