

FINANCIAL TIMES

How to spend it

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BURNING BRIGHT
NEW YORK ARTISTS TO WATCH



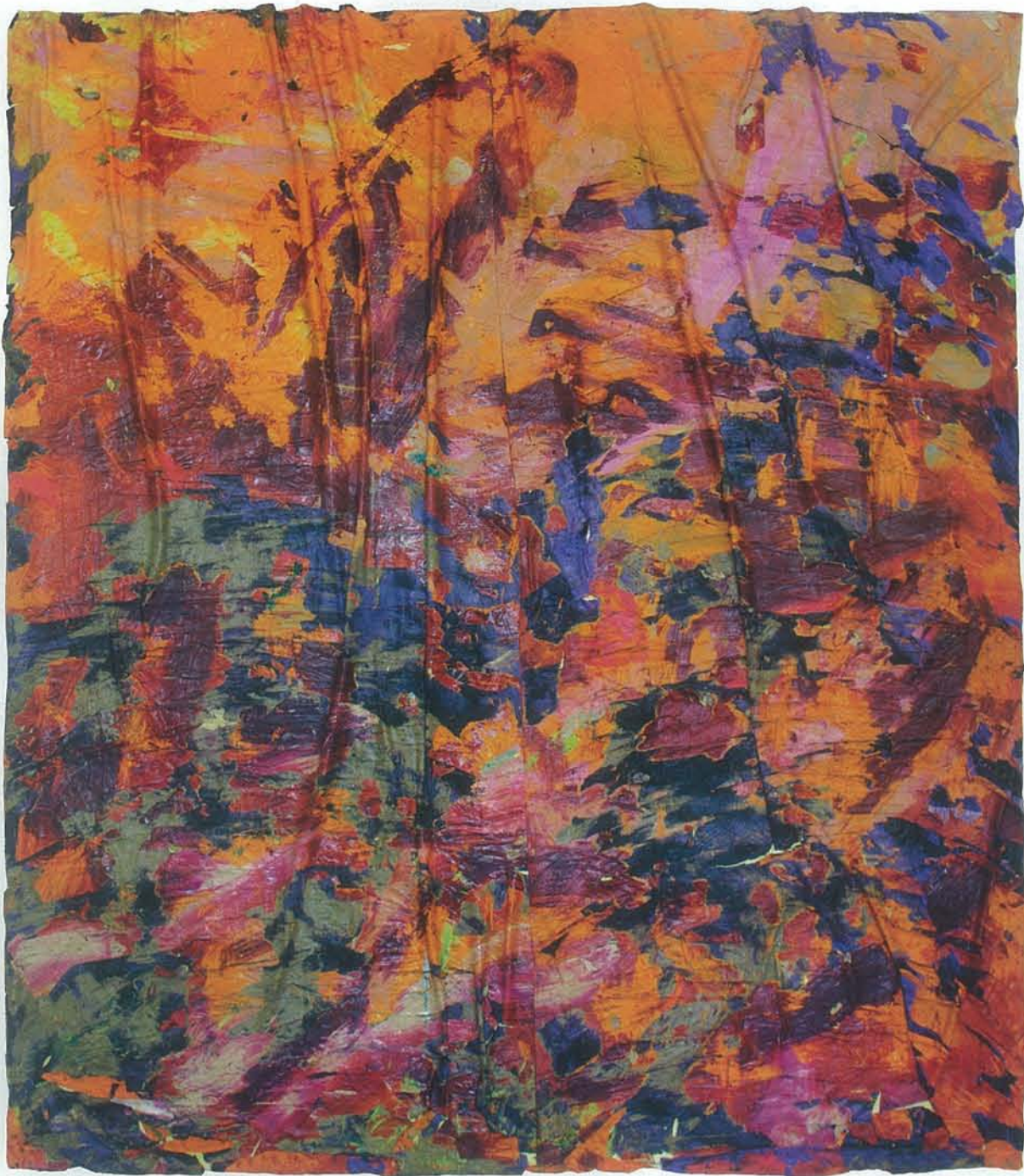
NEW YORK, NEW WAVE

A select group of New York artists has diverging visions and techniques – but they are united in their potential to be tomorrow’s most sought-after names. Pernilla Holmes reports. Portrait by Simon Watson.

Remember when New York was the epicentre of groundbreaking contemporary art? Depending on age or taste, you might be recalling the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Jackson Pollock and friends galvanised the world with abstract expressionism and “art for art’s sake”; or the 1960s, when Donald Judd, Carl Andre and others ushered in an era of minimalism; or later in the same decade when Warhol celebrated (and criticised) consumer culture with pop art. Or perhaps you think

of the 1980s, when balloon animals were turned into high art by Jeff Koons. The truth is that New York, as the economic centre of the art world – home to the most prestigious high-end galleries, museums, auction houses and collectors – is always a major hub for artists.

Nonetheless, over the past 20 years the collective eye of contemporary art has grown far more international, with entire countries (such as China) or continents (South America) suddenly declared “hot”. It’s not all marketing either – contemporary art genuinely tends to have Zeitgeist moments and creative bursts. And right now we are in the midst of an exceptional American art





moment, with New York at its centre. Unlike before, however, today's artists are impossible to neatly define and group together into schools of thought.

"Without question it's an especially interesting time for American art," says Mera Rubell who, with husband Don and son Jason, has one of the world's top collections of contemporary art, and a Miami museum to show it in. "And I don't say that because I'm American. We travel the world to look at art – we've been to China three times in the past year. Right now the most exciting work is from the US."

The Rubells' current exhibition, *American Exuberance*, showcases their recent acquisitions by New York artists, such as the burn-branded and black-wax-splashed wooden floorboard creations of Rashid Johnson (pictured left), the singed silver abstract canvases of Jacob Kassay, an ink-jet work by Wade Guyton that features a huge black X, and a vacuum-formed polystyrene piece outlining a breast and a jacket by Seth Price (pictured overleaf with an example of his work).

Young Americans are also a significant presence at the major art fairs, such as Frieze and Art Basel, and at international museums and biennials. New Yorker Joe Bradley's abstract canvases at Gavin Brown's Enterprise gallery won best booth at Frieze London, and highlights at Art Basel Miami included the studio-like installation by collaboration Guyton/Walker at Greene Naftali gallery and a petrified petrol pump made of fossilised limestone by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. When Documenta – the highly regarded mega-exhibition that occurs every five years in Germany – opens in June, it will include new works by Seth Price and Chicago-based Theaster Gates. Gates's rare ability to couple great aesthetics with social conscience – he's rebuilding entire

Far left: *Everything & Nothing*, 2011, collaged oil-paint skins on canvas, by Angel Otero. Left: Otero (seated) and Rashid Johnson. Above: *Family Jules*, 2011, in branded oak, black soap, wax and gold paint, by Rashid Johnson.

poverty-stricken, abandoned neighbourhoods in Chicago, St Louis and Omaha almost as if they were massive artworks – makes him one of art's great game-changers.

"Creativity is often at its best in times of recession or social unrest," says Don Rubell. "Thatcherite England laid the ground for the YBAs, for example. Right now is a very difficult time for America. It's trying to redefine itself – and artists are reacting to this."

So is the market. As more traditional investments have become increasingly volatile, art has strengthened as an asset class. "Art is a new focus after the stock market, gold and so on," German über-collector Thomas Olbricht told Bloomberg last year, observing that in the wake of the 2008 crash art prices bounced back faster than traditional investments. Certainly, buyers have become ever more passionate in their pursuit of the "next big thing".

For artists such as Brooklyn-based Kassay, the result has been the kind of frenzy that places an inordinate amount of stress on a young talent. In 2010, when he was 26, a painting that had sold through his gallery for \$12,000 the previous year went at auction for \$86,500; then, in October 2011, another work sold at auction for \$257,000. Rashid Johnson saw his work triple in value in a matter of months, now selling for between €100,000 and €500,000, and a significant number of young artists – including Marlo Pascual, Angel Otero (pictured on previous pages), Nick Mauss and Joe Bradley – have long waiting lists. But the fascinations

of the market, while titillating, are the least interesting aspect of the best art being made.

Crossing the Williamsburg Bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn is to watch the buildings transform from up-and-down, tightly squeezed fixtures on bustling streets into the long blocks of low-lying warehouses of deepest Williamsburg and Bushwick, where the streets are largely empty but for the occasional hipster smoking a cigarette. It's here – and increasingly in surrounding areas such as Greenpoint and Ridgewood, Queens – that many younger artists live and work.

On one such street, 34-year-old Johnson opens a vast, anonymous steel door to his long warehouse studio. In the past year, his work has exploded, with pieces at the Venice Biennale and an upcoming solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

He has been linked with "post-black" art, a term first used in the art world by curator Thelma Golden for those who do not wish to be labelled "black artists" but who are nonetheless interested in redefining notions of blackness. Nonchalant but charming, Johnson demurs: "Actually, I don't really see my work as political. I would say it is more biographical." He shows me footage from a video work on show at his new exhibition, *Rumble*, at Hauser & Wirth. The film is entitled *The New Black Yoga* and is of five African-American men doing yoga on a beach in the Hamptons – an area often associated with affluent, high-society Wasp culture. While his videos importantly



reveal his work wall pieces (ex as those geom usually have a them in luscio with things ass such as bowls albums. A rece

Left: *Untitled*, 2010, digital print mounted on Plexiglas, by Marlo Pascual (below)





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Left: *Untitled, 2008*, in Carpathian elm wood and diamond acrylic, by Seth Price (below).

that music, I put shea butter on my skin," he says, adding that black soap and shea butter are usually imported from Africa. "I like this suggestion that you are somehow trying to rub an idea of African-ness into your skin."

In Queens, in a vast industrial building, 30-year-old Puerto Rican artist Angel Otero and his assistant are scraping a skin of oil paint off a large sheet of glass. Eight years ago, Otero left a job as an insurance broker and moved to the US to study art. "It was so liberating," he says. "It was a big city. It was the first time I saw snow. But what really hit me was that I didn't know shit about contemporary art. I was like a sponge, soaking everything up as fast as I could."

Now fully engaged in art-world dialectics, it seems likely that not being steeped in tradition helped Otero think outside the box. His work (example pictured on opening pages) is unapologetically colourful and often very beautiful, though perhaps some of his best pieces play with garishness in a provocative way. But what most distinguishes him from other artists is his technique.

"I start by painting things from memory, or things that appeal to me, such as a photograph or pattern, on to glass," says Otero. He points to a luscious abstract, explaining that it began with an image of a couple that he saw in a magazine. Showing me a different work at a much earlier stage, he lifts a glass panel up to reveal a traditionally painted portrait. "They all start out this clear before we peel them," he explains. The perilous process of removing the oil-skin from the glass completely obfuscates the initial image. Otero then



slides the skin on to an epoxy-covered canvas where it fixes – layered, rippled and sculptural. Whatever it started out as, the materiality of the work now dominates over image as the subject.

Pushing a different medium, photography, is Marlo Pascual (pictured left next to an example of

her work). She was born in 1972 and trained as a photographer but now makes work out of found vintage images, which she manipulates and recontextualises with a flair that recalls the best of surrealist art. A prime example of her talent is a 2009 *Untitled* work in which a head-shot of a would-be starlet is pierced through the centre by a fluorescent bulb, the lower half of which also props the image up, as if it were a framed photo on a vast mantelpiece. Pascual has said she wants her work to "become a site of convergence between past and present, fiction and reality and drama and banality".

The diversity of practices among all these artists just scrapes the surface of a vastly varied cityscape of creative talent. According to the curators of the Whitney

Biennial (showing until May 27), Jay Sanders and Elisabeth Sussman, the disparity in styles can, -in part, be attributed to an increasingly global community. "I think it's a shift we've seen in the art world, and indeed the wider world," says

Sanders. "Means of communication are so much better and faster, galleries and schools have international programmes with teachers from all over the world, and artists travel a lot. Unlike the movements that prevailed in the past, we're now seeing a much broader national and international dialogue."

Sussman and Sanders spent most of last year travelling the US to look at art. "It's hard to define a specifically New York or even American style," says Sussman. "At a push, it maybe feels like artists are more imagination-based right now. And some artists are looking at more eccentric corners of the past for their influences." A case in point is Nick Mauss (an example of his work is pictured overleaf), a 31-year-old New Yorker who already has works in collections including the city's Museum of Modern Art and who features in the Whitney Biennial. He draws on 20th-century decorative art and fashion in his layered, dreamy drawings, favouring turn-of-the-century dandies and such cultural figures as Claude Debussy and George Sand.

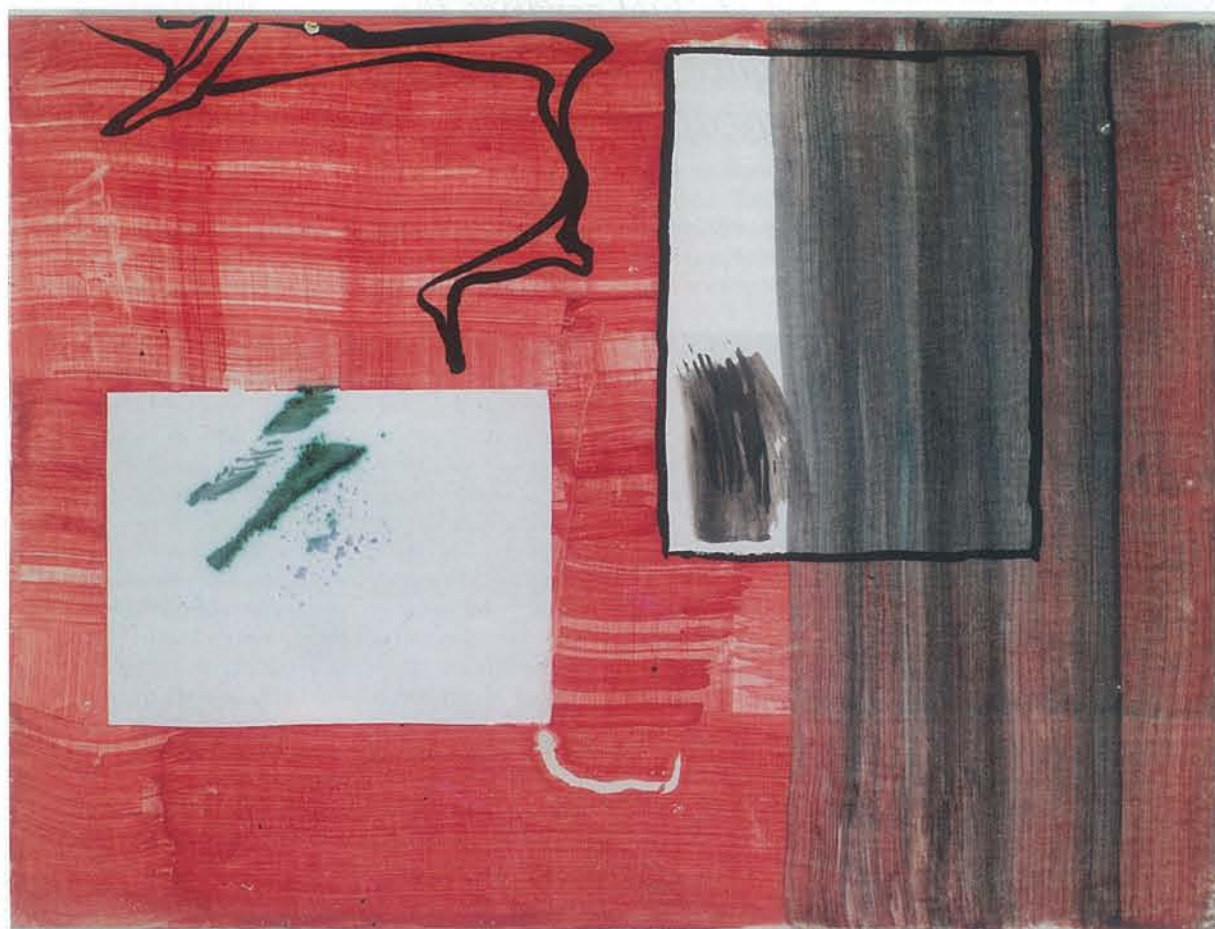
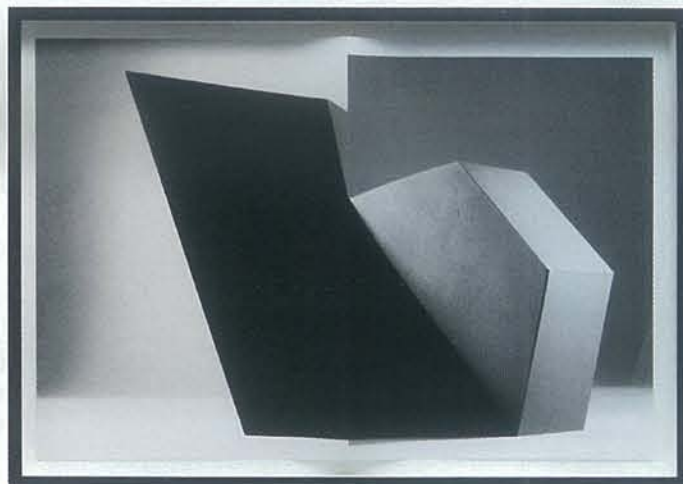
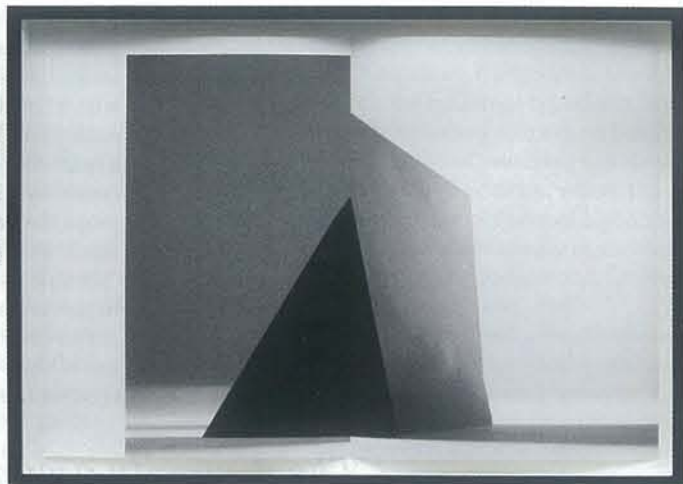
Another rising talent, also in the Biennial, is K8 Hardy, founder of the "genderqueer" feminist art collective LTTR, who takes the kind of dress-up role-play that made Cindy Sherman famous to a whole new level. As extreme as some of her outfit assemblages can be, Hardy is comfortable creating multiple identities for herself that she would happily wear any time.

Her work, along with Pascual's, is part of one of the most exciting developments in New York's "non-school" of artists – the emergence of photography as a playful medium for conceptual art. Canadian-born Erin Shirreff (pictured overleaf with an example of her work), for instance, creates dry black and white constructions that exploit the difference between what the eyes see and the camera captures to examine how what we project on to objects and reality impacts on our reading of the world. Lucas Blalock's colourful, smart and at times almost psychedelic images have been aptly described as "photographic paintings".

Shirreff shows with the Lisa Cooley Gallery, a small but soon-to-expand Lower East Side space that opened four years ago. Blalock shows with the two-year-old gallery Ramiken Crucible, set up by former art handler Mike Egan with Blaize Lehane, who, tired with New York's existing galleries, decided to show what they liked. Along with 47 Canal – an artist-run gallery – these are great examples of New York's burgeoning scene of smaller, spirited spaces that seek out new talents. Most are located on the Lower East Side – not so far from the polished and deservedly renowned galleries of



Right: *Signatures*, 2011, two archival pigment prints, by Erin Shirreff (above). Below: *Voice Over*, 2011, glazed ceramics, by Nick Mauss.



Chelsea, but much edgier in feel. Untitled Gallery on Orchard Street was among the first to show Rashid Johnson in New York (as well as LA-based artist Brendan Fowler, whose performance- and object-based practice has made him a coolly sought-after star). Others to watch include Rachel Uffner Gallery and West Street Gallery. The latter's founders, Alex Gartenfeld and Matt Moravec, are 25 and 27 respectively. Their space – a key destination for those at the vanguard – is located in Gartenfeld's apartment.

"It's a really great moment for self-starting organisations, and these are hugely important for younger artists," says Sanders. "We made a point of getting out to places such as The Artists' Institute on Eldridge Street, or Artists Space or White Columns, places where ideas are really being exchanged." He adds that performance art, which is also enjoying a revival in New York, is dependant on such places. According to Sussman, "It's a bit like the music scene – there are all these small places where artists congregate, such as The Stone or Le Poisson Rouge. And there's a really lively loft scene in Greenpoint, where people get together and talk."

For Peter Coffin, one of the most intelligent and quirky artists to emerge from New York – he's originally from the West Coast – this interchange of ideas across disciplines has been very important. He used to hang out at the now defunct live-music bar, Tonic: "I just love talking to musicians about art. They

usually have a much more open-ended way of thinking." Coffin is a tall, affable redhead who, one feels, has to talk fast to keep up with his lively brain. Past works have included a greenhouse in a gallery in which live music was played every day for the plants – the idea was to create a way of allowing musicians and visitors to communicate with nature through performing. "I'm guessing," says Coffin, "that most people did not really play the music just to help my plants grow. It's about projecting your consciousness on to that of a plant, and when you listen to the music you try to imagine what a plant might feel."

More recently, in a major installation in London, at Tate Britain, Coffin created bespoke animations and soundtracks for works he selected from the museum's collection. It was as if each artwork had come to life with a mind of its own. He is doing a similar project soon at the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

When I visited Coffin in Greenpoint, one of his assistants was researching how to create large bubbles of Plexiglas, and the other was on a conference call with a meteorologist and crop-dusting aeroplane pilot to make arrangements to dye a cloud pink.

"The kind of art that was around in New York when I studied was very codified," says Coffin, in an attempt to explain the roots of his desire to create new kinds of art experiences. "It was black, white, grey and serious. I was annoyed that ideas about

what made good art were so narrow." Judging from the medley of work that is now visible everywhere, New York's art world agrees. ♦

BIG IN THE BIG APPLE

ARTISTS AND GALLERIES: **47 Canal Street Gallery**, New York, NY 10002 (+1646-415 7712; www.47canalstreet.com). **303 Gallery**, 547 W 21st Street, New York, NY 10011 (+1212-255 1121; www.303gallery.com). **Angel Otero**, see Kavi Gupta Gallery and Lehmann Maupin. **Art: Concept**, 13 Rue des Arquebusiers, 75003 Paris (+331-5360 9030; www.galerieartconcept.com). **The Artists' Institute**, 163 Eldridge St, New York, NY 10002 (+1718-730 4349; www.theartistsinstitute.org). **Artists Space**, 38 Greene St, Third Floor, New York, NY 10013 (+1212-226 3970; www.artistspace.org). **Balice Hertling Gallery**, 47 Rue Ramponeau, 75020 Paris (+331-4033 4726; www.balicehertling.com). **Casey Kaplan Gallery**, 525 W 21st St, New York, NY 10011 (+1212-645 7335; www.caseykaplangallery.com). **David Kordansky Gallery**, 3143 S La Cienega Blvd, Unit A, Los Angeles, CA 90016 (+1310-558 3030; www.davidkordanskygallery.com). **Erin Shirreff**, see Lisa Cooley Gallery. **Friedrich Petzel Gallery**, 537 W 22nd St, New York, NY 10011 (+1212-680 9467; www.petzel.com). **Gavin Brown's Enterprise**, 620 Greenwich St, New York, NY 10014 (+1212-627 5258; www.gavinbrown.biz). **Greene Naftali**, 508 W 26th St, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10001 (+1212-463 7770; www.greenenaftaligallery.com). **Guillermo Calzadilla**, see Lisson Gallery. **Guyton/Walker**, see Greene Naftali Gallery. **Hauser & Wirth**, 32 E 69th St, New York, NY 10021 (+1212-794 4970; www.hauserwirth.com) and 23 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7287 2300). **Herald St**, 2 Herald St, London E2 (www.heraldst.com). **Jacob Kassay**, see Art: Concept. **Jennifer Allora**, see Lisson Gallery. **Joe Bradley**, see Gavin Brown's Enterprise and Jonathan Viner Gallery. **Jonathan Viner Gallery**, 17A Adam's Row, London W1 (07968-548 764; www.jonathanvinergallery.com). **K8 Hardy**, see Balice Hertling Gallery and Reena Spaulings. **Kavi Gupta Gallery**, 835 W Washington Blvd, Chicago, IL 60607 (+1312-432 0708; www.kavigupta.com). **Lehmann Maupin**, 201 Chrystie St, New York, NY 10002 (+1212-254 0054; www.lehmannmaupin.com). **Lisa Cooley Gallery**, 34 Orchard St, New York, NY 10002 (+1212-680 0564; www.lisa-cooley.com). **Lisson Gallery**, 52-54 Bell St, London NW1 (020-7724 2739; www.lissongallery.com). **Lucas Blalock**, see Ramiken Crucible. **Marlo Pascual**, see Casey Kaplan Gallery. **Nick Mauss**, see 303 Gallery. **Peter Coffin**, see Herald St. **Rachel Uffner Gallery**, 47 Orchard St, New York, NY 10002 (+1212-274 0064; www.racheluffnergallery.com). **Ramiken Crucible**, 389 Grand St, New York, NY 10002 (+1917-434 4245; www.ramikencrucible.com). **Rashid Johnson**, see David Kordansky Gallery and Hauser & Wirth. **Reena Spaulings**, 165 E Broadway, New York, NY 10002 (+1212-477 5006; www.reenaspaulings.com). **Seth Price**, see Friedrich Petzel Gallery. **Theaster Gates**, see Kavi Gupta Gallery. **Untitled Gallery**, 30 Orchard St, New York, NY 10002 (+1212-608 6002; www.nyuntitled.com). **Wade Guyton**, see Friedrich Petzel Gallery. **West Street Gallery**, 395 West St, New York, NY 10014; www.weststreet.info). **White Columns**, 320 W 13th St, New York, NY 10014 (+1212-924 4212; www.whitecolumns.org).

MUSEUM SHOWS: **Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago**, 220 East Chicago Ave, Chicago, IL 60611 (+1312-280 2660; mcchicago.org); *Rashid Johnson: Message to Our Folks*, April 14-August 5. **Rubell Family Museum**, 95 NW 29 St, Miami, FL 33127 (+1305-573 6090; www.rfc.museum); *American Exuberance* until July 27. **Whitney Museum**, 945 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10021 (+1212-570 3600; www.whitney.org); *Whitney Biennial* until May 27.

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