

SITUATIONS

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ART REVIEWS

What to See Right Now in New York Art Galleries

‘Souls Grown Diaspora,’ a movement’s northern reach; Frederick Weston’s ‘Blue Bedroom Blues’; Nicholas Krushenick’s collages; Eric Brown’s ‘Longhand’ paintings.

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‘Souls Grown Diaspora’

Through March 7. apexart, 291 Church Street, Manhattan; 212-431-5270, apexart.org.

Frederick Weston

Through Feb. 6. Ace Hotel New York, 20 West 29th Street, Manhattan; 212-679-2222, acehotel.com.

“Souls Grown Diaspora,” a vibrant assemblage of a group show organized by the artist Sam Gordon, proposes that a tradition of African-American self-taught art from the South, represented by the Atlanta-based Souls Grown Deep Foundation, also extends into the northern United States via the early-20th-century Great Migration. Ten contemporary artists chosen by Mr. Gordon eloquently make the case.

Many are, or were, based in New York City. The Bronx-born photographer Alvin Baltrop (1948-2004), the subject of a current retrospective at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (through Feb. 9), shot most of his thousands of pictures in a single Manhattan location, the now-vanished shipping piers on the lower West Side. Otis Houston Jr., who was born in 1954 in South Carolina and goes by the name Black Cherokee, has, since 1997, displayed handwritten signs (“Educate Yourself”) at a spot at the entrance to Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive at 122nd Street.

Until his death at age 47 in 2002, Curtis Cuffie, a tremendously imaginative sculptor, showed work made from scavenged materials on the streets of the Lower East Side. In the East Village, some 50 years ago, Sara Penn (1927-2020) opened Knobkerry, a landmark store-cum-gallery that was one of this country’s earliest global emporiums and functioned as an ever-changing work of installation art.

Like several other of the show’s participants, the Rev. Joyce McDonald, an active street preacher, works with found materials, which she shapes into portraits. (A ceramic bust of her photographer father, Willie McDonald, incorporating his clothing and one of his cameras, is a highlight.) Two non-New Yorkers, Wesley Willis (1963-2003) and Dapper Bruce Lafitte, are street artists in a literal, graphic sense: Mr. Willis produced hundreds of pen-and-ink cityscapes of his hometown, Chicago, while Mr. Lafitte draws meticulously detailed maps of New Orleans, where he was born in 1972.

About half of the artists chosen by Mr. Gordon are also musicians. In the 1990s, Mr. Willis fronted a punk band called Wesley Willis Fiasco. And the Detroit-born artist Stephanie Crawford, a talented still-life painter now in her 70s, has a much-admired and continuing international presence as a jazz vocalist. Recordings of her performances provide a soundtrack for the show.

By contrast, at least two artists in the roster have more private, not to say hermetic, studio practices. Almost all of Raynes Birkbeck’s Afro-futuristic paintings are done in his crowded Upper West Side apartment bedroom. And for many years, Frederick Weston has created elaborate collages — some celebrating Ms. Crawford — in single-room-occupancy hotels in Manhattan, moving a substantial and ever-growing pictorial archive to each new address.

One of those S.R.O.s, the Breslin, is now the site of Ace Hotel New York, where a selection of Mr. Weston’s 1999 collages, addressing his experience of living with H.I.V., is on display. Organized by Gordon Robicaux, a gallery and curatorial agency founded by Mr. Gordon and Jacob Robicaux, the show, “Blue Bedroom Blues,” was timed to complement the apexart exhibition and to coincide with the recent Outsider Art Fair. With their images of palm trees and cloudless blue skies, the collages refer to a very different South from the one of Mr. Weston’s origins — Memphis — but a story of cultural roots and routes still applies.

HOLLAND COTTER