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What to See in New York Art Galleries Right Now

Leonor Fini's post-internet paintings; contemporary sculptures from the French Caribbean and Haiti; Luke Stettner's painfully personal show; and Joseph Urban's sumptuous theater sets.



Installation view of "Dust Specks on the Sea: Contemporary Sculpture From the French Caribbean and Haiti" at the Hunter East Harlem Gallery. Natalie Conn, via Hunter East Harlem Gallery

'Dust Specks on the Sea'

Through March 2. Hunter East Harlem Gallery, 2180 Third Avenue, Manhattan; 212-396-7819, huntereastharlemgallery.org.

You know how it usually goes when museums survey the contemporary art of non-Western regions; they focus on a few zones already on the radar of a multinational's chief development officer, like "the Middle East" or "Latin America" or even the 4.5-billion-strong region of "Asia," and flatten them into inconsequence. It's much rarer to see shows with a real local focus on places beyond the executive suite's gaze, like this small but very welcome exhibition of nearly two dozen artists from the Francophone Caribbean, at Hunter College's outpost in East Harlem. The artists here come from Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana — which, politically at least, are as much a part of France as Alaska and Hawaii are part of the United States — as well as from Haiti, the Caribbean's lone French-speaking republic.

Some of the artists in "Dust Specks on the Sea: Contemporary Sculpture From the French Caribbean and Haiti" already have international careers, like the incisive, historically minded Mathieu K. Abonnenc, born in French Guiana, who here presents a wraithlike silver ring made from a melted-down heirloom, and Kenny Dunkan, born in Guadeloupe, whose row of dozens of metal fuel cans with long, flaccid spouts acerbically alludes to stereotypes of black male anatomy. A small, beguiling sculpture by Gaëlle Choisine, consisting of a bronze cast of an oyster shell suspended like some magic charm, is paired with a new recording of a sonata by Carmen Brouard, a Haitian-born modernist composer. Well over half the artists, though, were new to me; their art ranges from the soporifically one-note (bananas hanging from a chandelier, nations' flags knotted together, a boat with black hands rising from the hull) to the freer and more poetic, as in a free-standing painting with collaged photographs by Louisa Marajo.

Much of the art here, for better and for worse, would not be out of place in a Lower East Side gallery or an art fair booth in Basel or Miami. But that is the point: as the great Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant insisted, no artistic identity is absolute and no region is off the map. JASON FARAGO