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# Uptown, a Jumble of Treasures

By KEN JOHNSON

At the southeast entrance to Central Park stands a colorful, tubular structure resembling a swing-set frame designed by spiders on LSD. Touching ground at 10 points on the cobbled plaza, its red, green and black striped posts rise at different angles into an airy web more than 18 feet high at its tallest. A playful riff on the ancient form of the triumphal arch, “Empire,” by the Irish sculptor [Eva Rothschild](#), may be viewed for the purposes at hand as a metaphorical gateway to the entertainingly illogical array of new and old artworks awaiting Midtown and Upper East Side gallery hoppers.

A suggested itinerary would have you begin at the Crown Building on Fifth Avenue just below 57th Street where two galleries have extremely different shows. Gering & López presents a 30-year survey of works on paper by the Postmodernist abstract painter Peter Halley. Neatly limned ink drawings from 1981 declare the concepts on which his retro-Modernist, grid-based paintings have been based: they are schematic renderings of prison cells that represent modern systems of dwelling, technology and communication as a vast, interconnected penitentiary of consciousness. On the other hand, more than three dozen small, Day-Glo-hued paintings on paper, from 1977 to 2010, attest to a nimble, geometric formalist sensibility reminiscent of the early Frank Stella.

Downstairs in the same building Hirschl & Adler offers a group of paintings of women by the 19th-century French academician [William Adolphe Bouguereau](#), whose art represents everything that early Modernists like van Gogh and Cézanne detested: neo-classical draftsmanship, polished technique, sentimental narratives and genteel eroticism. Today those qualities make his works magnetic.

The show leans to the demure side of Bouguereau, whose paintings of underdressed women often border on soft porn. Nevertheless it is fascinating to contemplate a pastoral, heart-tugging fantasy like “Gypsy Girls,” a full-length, near-photorealist portrait of a rustic beauty in peasant dress holding a pudgy child in her arms. With the Industrial Revolution going full steam in the real world, academic artists sought solace in visions of timeless femininity.

Next you could proceed half a block west on 57th Street to Marian Goodman, where the

Spanish sculptor Cristina Iglesias has installed a series of works combining Minimalist sleekness and illusory naturalism. In one gallery you come upon chest-high black granite-faced cubes; peering over the edges you discover interiors, made of cast resin, resembling sections of muddy earth and root-lined holes in the ground. Circulating water pours over these inner surfaces and fills the deeper cavities. In another gallery space a rectangular version is imbedded in a floor paved in concrete blocks. This would be perfect for your home atrium.

From here you might head northeast to the Americas Society on Park Avenue, where [Arturo Herrera](#) has installed a two-screen music and video piece. Static montages of abstract black-and-white imagery change rapidly while the sounds of Stravinsky's score for the ballet "Les Noces" fill the darkened room. Mr. Herrera is known for paintings, collages and sculptures in which fragmentary forms derived from Disney cartoons and similar sources are composed into lively abstractions. He created the video here using a set of 80 black-and-white photographs that he shot of scraps of cut-up materials lying around his studio. (The photographs are also in the show.) It is only too bad he didn't make the film in eye-popping colors to match the strident sounds of Stravinsky's music.

Farther east, on 66th Street, Adam Baumgold Fine Art has an engaging show of small works by the septuagenarian painter [Rafael Ferrer](#), who last year had a much admired retrospective at El Museo del Barrio. One gallery wall is covered by a gridded arrangement of zany faces drawn in color in different mediums and styles, including Cubist, Expressionist, Pop and psychedelic, on brown paper bags. Similarly engrossing is a set of almost 100 small, wood-framed blackboards, each with a black-and-white painting; among them are abstractions, portraits, still lifes, nudes and gnomonic texts.

Two blocks north "Massage," a small group show at Andrew Roth, presents cerebral works inspired partly by Marshall McLuhan's quipping play on his famous pronouncement "The medium is the message." Pamela Rosenkranz imprints expressionist smears of terra-cotta-colored paint on large rectangles of white terrycloth; Antek Walczak draws mathematical grids over prints of a heroic fantasy poster; Sean Paul makes artist books involving the semiotics of spontaneity and digitalization. In a sculpture by Georgia Sagri a small flat screen imbedded in a fancy white handbag plays a video montage of pictures of an exhibition by David Hammons, an artist known for works obliquely referring to racial issues, and news footage of the recent revolution in Egypt.

The last two exhibitions on the tour belong to that gray area known as Post-Minimalism. At Knoedler on 70th Street there is a four-decade survey of works by [Richard Fleischner](#), a Providence, R.I., sculptor known for outdoor environments. This show of small indoor

pieces shows Mr. Fleischner integrating his influences over the years: Jasper Johns and Brice Marden in gray, gridded works on paper, for example. Most compelling are groups of diminutive sculptures on tabletops. One is like a miniature Richard Serra. Twigs compressed into house shapes and drenched in wax are like collaborations between Eva Hesse and a young Joel Shapiro. Aged-looking wooden boxes with interior compartments and wooden grids evoke Joseph Cornell in a bad mood.

There is a curious, sometimes frustrating reticence in Mr. Fleischner's invariably elegant work, which often involves walls, as in large, shadowy, black-and-white photographs of flat surfaces that verge on pure abstraction. What psychic energies lurk within or behind those impenetrable barriers?

At Craig F. Starr on 73rd Street, the transition from Minimalism to Postmodernism is played out in a beautiful duet of works by [Eva Hesse](#) and her friend and mentor [Sol LeWitt](#). Organized by Veronica Roberts, director of research for the Sol LeWitt Wall Drawing Catalogue Raisonné, it presents 26 works from the LeWitt estate.

Besides their personal relationship, which lasted from 1960 until Hesse's death in 1970, the two artists shared a preoccupation with the grid. While Hesse gave it a subtly surrealistic combination of industrial and erotic qualities, LeWitt favored a more purely abstract approach. Compare, for example, his Platonic all-white 3-D gridded cube skeleton from 1965 and her cube of perforated steel with hundreds of little rubber tubes inserted to create a furry, sexually suggestive interior. Both produced gridded works on paper, but while his look like engineering designs, hers have an exquisite sensuality, as in a 1966 wash drawing of rows of concentric circles in delicate shades of gray. Think of this show as a story of love between rational mind and passionate intuition.