

Critic's Picks: Exhibitions of the Summer

LIFE—a group show, curated by Arnold J. Kemp, Artists Space, 11 Cortlandt Alley, New York City, through August 16, 2025

Reviewed by Alex Kitnick



LIFE—a group show, installation view. Courtesy Artists Space. Photo: Carter Seddon. Pictured, far left, on wall: Christopher Garrett, "A LINE OF FLUID BLUE IS JUST THERE" (after Etel Adnan), 2015. Far right, on floor: Nayland Blake, *Rafts*, 2019.

In 1975, twenty-three-year-old impresario Jeffrey Deitch presented *Lives: Artists Who Deal With Peoples' Lives (Including Their Own) As The Subject And/Or The Medium of Their Work* at 105 Hudson Street, then known as the Fine Arts Building, in New York. Fifty years later and five blocks to the east, multi-hyphenate Arnold J. Kemp is staging *LIFE*—a group show at Artists Space, which trims Deitch's title but maintains a similar spirit. How to fit the sprawling diversity of *LIFE* into the two hundred and fifty words I'm allotted here? At a June 5 performance, Gregg Bordowitz offered a near-abecedarium of fifteen terms—activism, alprazolam, art, betrayal, censorship, complacency, complicity, critical theory, eschatology, faith, improvisation, illness, independence, institutional critique, Marxism, mendacity, mortality, museum, negation, practice, program, service, structural determinism, study, testimony, volition, vulnerability, witness—riffing on each for two minutes. In the gallery, Nayland Blake offers a single vocable, delivering candles shaped to form the word LOVE in partially melted red, white, and blue wax. The effect is both mournful and hopeful, matching the show's many affects and media.

"The big mess of having a life," a grave-rubbed frottage by Christopher Garrett reads, quoting poet Etel Adnan, and poetry might be one skeleton key here: a zine of verse edited by Kemp with contributions by Erica Hunt, John Keene, and others sits on a shelf free for the taking. Correspondence is crucial, too. In a vitrine by the entrance, one finds letters sent to Geoffrey Hendricks from Pope.L, the late performance artist whose life and work touched many of the show's contributors. That both of these artists—the former a progenitor of Fluxus and the latter a protean figure who reanimated its legacy—have passed, in 2018 and 2023, respectively, also seems pertinent. A contemporary exhibition cast in the shape of a makeshift memorial, *LIFE* is largely about what comes after life. The writer Robert Glück captures the ethos best with a brick-painted ceramic lingam dedicated to the New York painter Martin Wong (1946–99). Rest in power.