

# THE NEW YORKER

## ART

### MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

#### MOMA PS1

"Julia Phillips: Failure Detection"

This young German artist combines glazed ceramic elements with hardware to haunting effect. Sculptural vignettes allude to anatomy with handprints, masklike casts, and mysterious implements whose uses might be surgical, hygienic, or sexual. In "Extruder (#1)," a fragmentary figure, suspended from an armature of metal pipes, is reduced to its orifices and seems to have become one with the plumbing. Beside it, on a platform of concrete tiles, lies a very large, very dangerous-looking metal helix. Phillips's sculptures are singular, but they do have affinities with pioneering works that preceded them. The surreal air and corporeal references of her tableaux recall the oneiric installations of Louise Bourgeois; a quartet of monoprints, made using the crotches of panty hose to create webbed and ragged forms, nod to Senga Nengudi's innovative use of nylons to conjure the predicaments and potentials of the human body. *Through Sept. 3.*

#### Whitney Museum

"Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables"

This retrospective of the Iowan painter fascinates as a plunge into certain deliriums of the United States in the nineteen-thirties, notably a culture war between cosmopolitan and nativist sensibilities. But any notion that Wood—who died in 1942, of pancreatic cancer, on the day before his fifty-first birthday—is an underrated artist fizzles. "American Gothic" is, by a very wide margin, his most effective picture (although "Dinner for Threshers," from 1934, a long, low, cutaway view of a farmhouse at harvesttime, might be his best). Wood was a strange man who made occasionally impressive, predominantly weird, sometimes god-awful art in thrall to a programmatic sense of mission: to exalt rural America in a manner adapted from Flemish Old Masters. "American Gothic"—starchy couple, triune pitchfork, churchy house, bubbly trees—succeeded, deserving the inevitable term "iconic" for its punch and tickling ambiguity. The work made Wood, at the onset of his maturity as an artist, a national celebrity, and the attendant pressures pretty well wrecked him. Why Wood now? A political factor might seem to be in play. Although the show was planned before the election of Donald Trump, it feels right on time, given the worries of urban liberals about the insurgent conservative truculence in what is often dismissed—with a disdain duly noted by citizens of the respective states—as flyover country. *Through June 10.*

#### Museum of Arts and Design

"Surface/Depth: The Decorative After Miriam Schapiro"

Schapiro, who died in 2015, at the age of ninety-one, was a second-generation Abstract Expressionist turned first-generation feminist artist. She also became a leading figure in the Pattern and Decoration movement—a more-is-more retort to Minimalism, in the nineteen-seventies—

and coined the portmanteau "femmage" to describe her ebullient, intricate, textile-and-paint compositions. By maintaining that domestic craft techniques and materials could also be used in fine art, Schapiro lit the path for countless artists who followed; this exhibition pairs examples from her oeuvre with an inspired selection of paintings, assemblages, and sculptures by others, which echo not only Schapiro's formal strategies but also her politics, with tongue-in-cheek deployments of decorative elements. Ruth Root's colorful homage to her feminist-art forebears, made specifically for this occasion, is a shaped canvas with a scalloped edge, very much in the spirit of Schapiro's own fan- and heart-shaped femmages. Sanford Biggers repurposes antique quilts, embellishing their found geometry with sequins and paint to reflect on African-American traditions of abstraction. Sara Rahbar mines her Iranian-American heritage in customized Union Jacks, in which the white-on-blue stars are attended by densely sewn stripes made of decorative trim found in Kurdistan, camouflage-print military waist packs, name patches, and ammo. *Through Sept. 9.*

### GALLERIES—CHELSEA

#### Annette Kelm

The German photographer's cryptic pictures—mostly still-lives of such subjects as flowers, fabrics, dollar bills, and a miniature easel—feel at once spontaneous and carefully staged, reminiscent of the groundbreaking commercial work of the mid-twentieth-century pioneer of color printing Paul Outerbridge. "Still Life with Spring" is a pun on its title: a multi-colored ceramic vase holds a vernal bouquet of peonies accompanied by a coiled metal spring. In the painterly "Holiday Season," rumpled daisy-print fabric provides the backdrop for a purse made from an old pair of bluejeans and leather. Cigarettes peek out of the denim pockets, alongside a spray of dried thistle. In this nonchalant collision of the mass-produced and the handcrafted, Kelm puts a sly twist on the tradition of vanitas. *Through May 12. (Kreps, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)*

#### Erin Shirreff

Negative space—and outer space, too—is as assertive as physical form in the work of this New York-based artist, which toggles between photographic and sculptural, flat and deep, moving and static. The centerpiece is a wall-filling video, entitled "Son," in which colors shift slowly around a central black circle; it was inspired by the recent solar eclipse, a moment when the sun resembled a void. On other walls, large crescents and slivers of printed aluminum are arranged in deep frames; while adamantly abstract, they could pass for dioramas of phases of the moon. With speckled cyanotypes printed on pictures of sculptures torn out of books, Shirreff seems to suggest that her own spatial investigations are simply part of a continuum—a reminder that even the stillest object is also on the move, thanks to the passage of time. *Through May 15. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)*

#### Gedi Sibony

This native New Yorker first made his name as a cerebral scavenger-minimalist, rescuing everyday cast-offs—broken venetian blinds, remnants of carpet—and reincarnating them into sculptures. If that poetic work was formalist haiku, his new room-filling rescue, "The King and the Corpse," is an epic: Sibony has transplanted a former White Castle, now scrubbed of all corporate identity, from Brooklyn to Chelsea. The ramshackle white porcelain-enamelled steel shell, with its battlement roof, is held together by screws, bolts, and ad-hoc materials (duct tape, scraps of wood, C-clamps). It's been modified somewhat to fit inside the space, where it just grazes the ceiling and leaves a dry moat of floor around its exterior. The structure's modularity may invite thoughts of Donald Judd's stacks; its reconceptualization of architecture recalls Michael Asher and what jargoneers call "institutional critique." But the institution in Sibony's crosshairs isn't the art-industrial complex for which the term was coined—it's that derelict white fortress, America itself. *Through May 5. (Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)*

### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

#### Miyoko Ito

This transporting exhibition will likely be your introduction to Ito's cerebral and beautiful paintings: until her death, in 1983, the Berkeley-born artist remained little known outside her adopted home town of Chicago, where she was both celebrated and an outlier. Her idiosyncratic style is deftly described in an accompanying essay by Jordan Stein as "at once first-person and topographic." Ito's canvases verge on representation—of landscapes, interiors, and machines—while also appearing to be in a state of subtle flux. In the dusky "Gorodiva," from 1968, a winsome hybrid form (perhaps a protozoan absorbing a valise) seems to undulate, an effect achieved with the meticulous application of thinly painted ombre layers. Similarly, the green-gold stack of tubes in an untitled piece from 1971-72, which has some kinship with the work of Ito's fellow-Chicagoan Ray Yoshida, seems to sway as shifting light drapes it in partial shadow. *Through May 6. (Artists Space, 55 Walker St. 212-226-3970.)*

### GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

#### Jan Groover

The photographer, who died in 2012, dedicated her career to the still-life. So the heart of this selection of her early works is surprising: a cache of eight-by-ten pictures of buildings, taken in 1971-72, in Hartford, Connecticut, where she was then teaching painting. Almost defiantly banal, in the vein of Bernd and Hilla Becher, they transform architecture into object. There are other treasures here, too, including a lush platinum-palladium print of bottles and watering cans set against dark velvet. To make one small triptych, in 1974, Groover waited by the side of a highway until she caught a sequence of cars in primary colors. That the shots are all blurry helps the speeding vehicles land a punch line about painting: Barnett Newman famously titled one series of canvases "Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue." *Through May 15. (Borden, 91 Water St. 212-431-0166.)*