

# The New York Times

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

## A Bouquet of Group Art Shows Near Houston Street

These expansive exhibitions, in galleries on or near the Lower East Side, create an immersive sense of art and the reawakening art scene.



"Trump is Toast," 2018, by actor and artist Jim Carrey. Collection Andrew Edlin.

**By Roberta Smith**

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Nothing says welcome back to the art world like a gallery group show. Consider it a choral, rather than solo, performance that speaks of the diversity and durability of art, an affirmation that is especially needed after months of inactivity, isolation and uncertainty. Not that any of that is over.

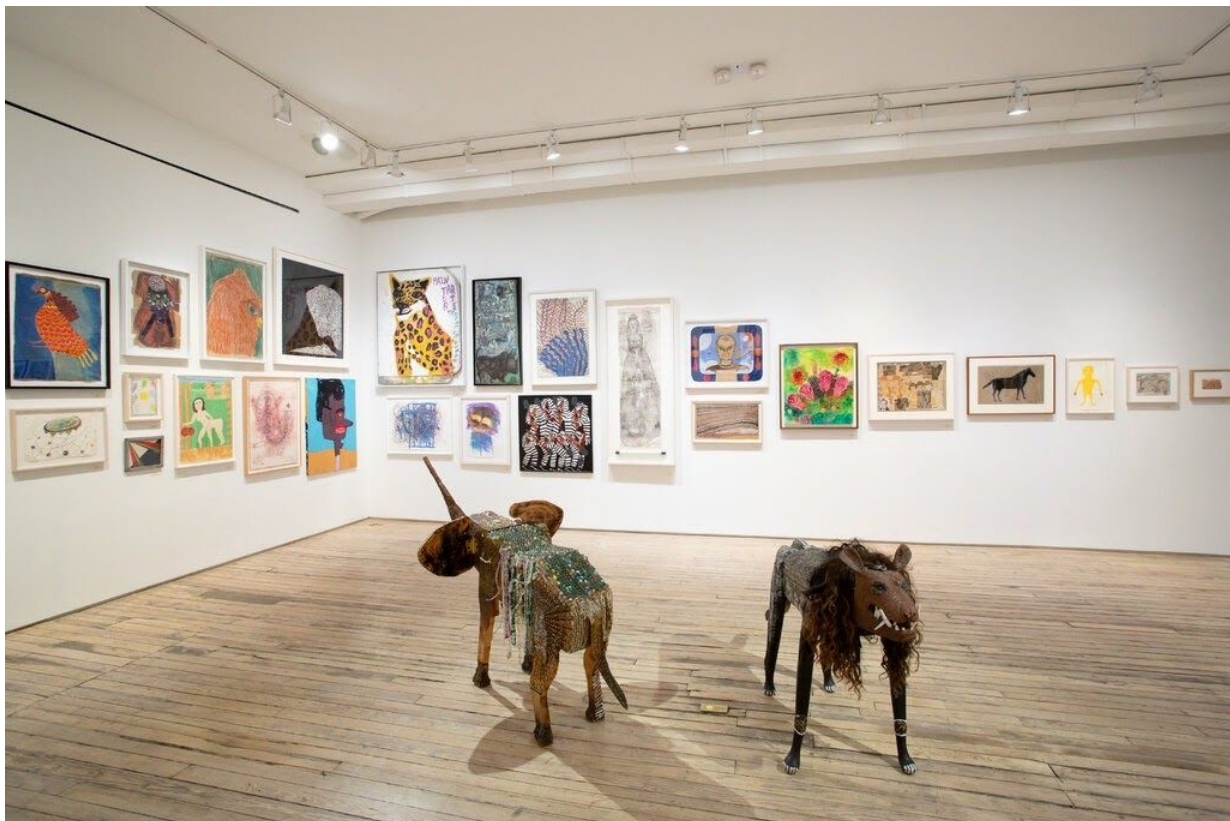
Nonetheless, these types of exhibitions allow us to catch up, to cover extra ground and to appreciate the persistence, against all odds, of art galleries that are less than global in their reach. They can be focused or broad; can touch on particular themes or histories. And group shows are also self-portraits, snapshots of the gallery's sensibility and purpose. Right now four exhibitions on or near the Lower East Side, while also available online, especially reward in-person visits.

## ‘An Alternative Canon: Art Dealers Collecting Outsider Art’

Through Sept. 19 at Andrew Edlin Gallery, 212 Bowery; [edlingallery.com](http://edlingallery.com).

Like Karma's flower show, “An Alternative Canon” is an expansive, densely-installed blowout, although more rambunctious in its diversity and sometimes rough-edged objects, most notably two gaudy, garrulous collie-size sculptures of a glammed-up lion and an elephant made by O.L. Samuels from the collection of Arne Anton.

The exhibition, which has been organized by the curator and critic Paul Laster, reviews the historic, tumultuous and continuing expansion of contemporary art fomented by outsider art starting in the early 1970s — along with that era's various liberation movements — and further stretches its elastic boundaries.



An installation view of “An Alternative Canon,” with, in the foreground, two collie-size sculptures of a lion and an elephant by O.L. Samuels. Credit: Olya Vysotskaya

Is the photographer Weegee, who taught himself his trade and elevated it to art, an outsider? Is the poet and actor Taylor Mead, who once scrawled on a small black canvas the sentence, “I was born with a silver foot in my mouth”? And what about Jim Carrey, a genius as an actor, represented here by a cartoonish work on paper that portrays the president as a piece of toast?

Canonical artists abound here, among them Bill Traylor, Henry Darger, Adolf Wölfli, Grandma Moses and Minnie Evans (also in the Karma show). And, of course, a main attraction lies in seeing what art dealers, who rank high among the people who cannot live without art, keep for themselves. Their choices can be great, eccentric or, it seems, what they could afford or couldn't sell. None of that is detailed here so you have to just look and form your own opinions.



“Pachamama,” by Elisabetta Zangrandi. James Barron Collection

Perhaps you'll be drawn — as I was — to excellent work by unfamiliar names. This includes several pieces lent by Shari Cavin and Randall Morris of Chelsea's Cavin-Morris Gallery, among them a tapestry-like stain-painted scene of mythological animals by Leonard Daley from 1998; a small drawing of a pile of words and neon details by Zdenek Kosek (1991); and a sedimentary array of scrolling lines by Joseph Lambert (2014). Also of interest, a hallucinogenic

landscape painting by Elisabetta Zangrandi, and a painting of a slightly squishy female nude by Vera Girivi from the dealer James Barron. Overall, these efforts leave no doubt that art of quality is always being made somewhere, by someone, and that there are, inevitably, people seeking it out.