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ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, WILL HEINRICH and MARTHA SCHWENDENER FEB. 21, 2018



James Barnor's "NIFA NIFA," 1974. Credit: James Barnor, via October Gallery, London

‘This Synthetic Moment’

Through March 10. David Nolan, 527 West 29th Street, Manhattan; 212-925-6190, davidnolangallery.com.

The three photos of his own that David Hartt included in “This Synthetic Moment,” [a six-photographer show](#) he curated at David Nolan Gallery, are fraught with disembodied melancholy. “Interval XIII” shows a lone auto parked on the street, closely wrapped in what looks like a giant blue garbage bag, and in “Interval I,” a few small, worse-for-wear boats list in the water. But all the other images he chose are of black women and men, and they add up to an exceptionally rich demonstration of racial identity as a continuous act of self-creation.

A large new print of an untitled self-portrait shot in 1964 by the Brooklyn-born activist and photographer Kwame Brathwaite, presented with a '68 portrait of his wife, nearly does the job alone. Goateed and handsome in a pinstripe suit jacket, Mr. Brathwaite emerges from a shadowed background with lips slightly parted, as if about to speak into his camera like a microphone. His expression has both the unfinished quality of a subject surprised and the urgent attention of a photographer striving to capture such a moment. Both, of course, are poses — but they're authentic ones.

Liz Johnson Artur, who's been shooting black communities in Brixton, South London, for more than two decades, brings out a similar point with clothing. An extraordinarily absorbing 20-minute digital montage includes just enough dramatically monochrome uniforms to make the details of everyone else's outfits seem equally intentional. White robes, to take one example, appear on men in church; women in mosque; and with thin rainbow stripes at a gathering of Rastafarians.

WILL HEINRICH