

# HYPERALLERGIC

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ART

## Watering the Imagination at the Spring Break Art Show

Even if the overall theme seems unrelated to much of the work on display, this art show has a way of allowing curators and artists to realize their own unique visions.

Seph Rodney | March 8, 2018



Part of the installation by Onyedika Chuke, FMA: The\_Untitled/Circa\_1968\_Part 1, curated by Dustin Yellin (photo by Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

I'm told there's a theme to this year's [Spring Break art fair](#): "[a] Stranger Comes to Town." I don't believe it. I mean, I don't believe that there really is any central conceit binding the 150+ curatorial projects and 400+ featured artists pressed within the spaces that Condé Nast media company once occupied, and this suspicion is visually borne out as I walk the event. But that hardly matters. I'm so taken with the

fine handling of the materials, the way that each room, hallway, former corner office is wholly transformed into a small haven of aesthetic vision that even with the works I don't understand or particularly like I'm impressed by the degree of *care* taken to make them so.

While the Art Dealer's Association of America's fair ([which took place last week](#)) feels calmly oriented toward its upmarket clients, and the Armory Show feels fervently so — as if using expensive trappings to elbow other galleries aside to confirm a higher position on the status ladder — they and others tend to feel like

highly organized bazaars. Alternatively, Spring Break feels like a greenhouse with several smaller gardens tucked inside. I didn't feel that I spent enough time there, though I was walking and looking for almost three hours.



A piece by Nate Lewis in the *Latent Tensions* exhibition of his work curated by Dustin Yellin at Spring Break (all photos by the author unless otherwise noted)

I spend time in [Nate Lewis's](#) studio (curated by [Dustin Yellin](#)) looking at the black and white images he took of the 2017 presidential inauguration that he sculpts in a way that is the signature of his practice. In each picture of *Latent Tensions* the surface of the material on which the image is printed is picked and raised as if subjected to a ritual scarification that utterly changes the image's connotative meanings.

Inspecting the work in his room which was painted black and carpeted with a deep, velvety black rug that under my feet buoyed up my weight imparting a slightly fey feeling to that room as if I had entered a lushly appointed cave. Also on the same floor of the fair that occupies the 22nd and 23rd floors of a midtown office tower, I experience the immersive work of [Kambui Olujimi](#) whose *Redshift*, curated by Melinda Wang, plunged me back into the [events and aftermath of the Unite the Right rally at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville](#) where, as Olujimi explained, the mythology of whiteness came to the surface. Against a backdrop of images of enraged white men carrying torches, which formed a kind of wallpaper that lined the room, Olujimi had also placed framed, hand-drawn watercolor images of white men and women who had attempted to kill sitting US Presidents — many of them lionized for acting based on their personal perceptions of being oppressed by a tyrannical government and its agents. This exhibition is a small but potent excavation of the mythology that imagines human agency as (only) rightly belonging to the bodies of those considered white.

Several other exhibitions were visually compelling or inventive, or so fully realized that I couldn't help but spend the necessary time to suss out their meanings. Lynn Sullivan and Dominic Nurre curated *Ours*, a lovely version of what looked like a miniature museum. The show *Self on the Shelf* curated by Christine Miele was one of those technology-driven extravaganzas that don't quite work as planned, but most of the time when I touched a black dot on a quotidian furnishing in what was designed to look like a bedroom, the whole scene shifted and music and images wafting across the walls made me feel like by touching the button, I had entered a wormhole.



Installation view of work by Melissa Maddonni Haims

Also pursuing that possibilities of digital technology, *Jonathan Rosen: Double Life*, curated by Laura O'Reilly, Alessandra DeBenedetti, and Regina Harsanyi presented a room full of huge screens that seen with my own eyes looked like a typical Twitter feed, but with an attendant holding up an iPad to filter the contents, became a three-dimensional stream of bots and ersatz identities floating to the “top” of a pell mell visual screed.



Installation view of Kambui Olujimi's Redshift curated by Melinda Wang (photo courtesy the artist)

Throughout, I was impressed by how the things made by hand were just as striking. Onyedika Chuke's FMA: The\_Untitled/Circa\_1968\_Part 1, also curated by Dustin Yellin, was a strange intervention in the common hall space between rooms. It features the winged feet of some forgotten monument and a broken Statue of Liberty that looks like a mothballed memorial found in some hoarder's back closet.

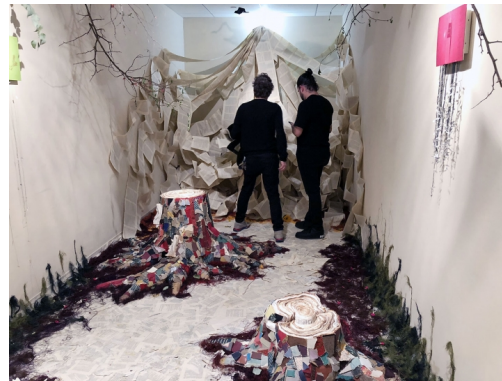
Kumasi J. Barnett: Secret Identities, curated by Jac Lahav, uses Barnett's hand-painted interventions to riff on the melodrama of old Marvel and DC comic books, thus toying with and reifying the notion of the “Amazing Black Man” and other comic book heroes. Rachel Marks: The Poetry of Earth, curated by Che Morales, was an enthralling installation of plants and verdant life that seemed promising in its resistance to the hegemony of digital abstraction. Inliquid Art + Design curated *The Space In Between* featuring work by fiber artist Melissa Maddonni Haims, who constructed a gorgeous cavern full of hanging (sometimes swaying with the passage of people) textiles like soft stalactites growing in a twilit cove. Hiba Schahbaz: The Garden, curated by Jacob Rhodes, Alissa Polan, Kristen Racaniello, and Rachel Frank





Kumasi J. Barnett, "Racist Comics 467" (2015-2018) (photo Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)

of Field Projects, presented Schahbaz's work, which is centered on her own brown, female body, as a kind of icon of idealized femininity. It is studiously lovely work of drawing and painting that sees the feminine almost everywhere: earth, sky, water, and trees.



Rachel Marks: The Poetry of Earth, curated by Che Morales (photo Hrag Vartanian/Hyperallergic)



Spring Break feels like a reprieve, despite the nigh overwhelming hodge podge of the 23rd floor, and despite the fact that just the views from some of the (former) office windows can dwarf some of the work displayed. It is refreshing in its careful nurturing of each exhibition, as if one could remake the art fair model, one tiny garden at a time.

Installation view of *Hiba Schahbaz: The Garden*  
curated by Jacob Rhodes, Alissa Polan, Kristen  
Racaniello, and Rachel Frank

*The [Spring/Break Art Show](#) continues at 4 Times Square (Entrance at 144 West 43rd Street), Midtown, Manhattan until March 12.*