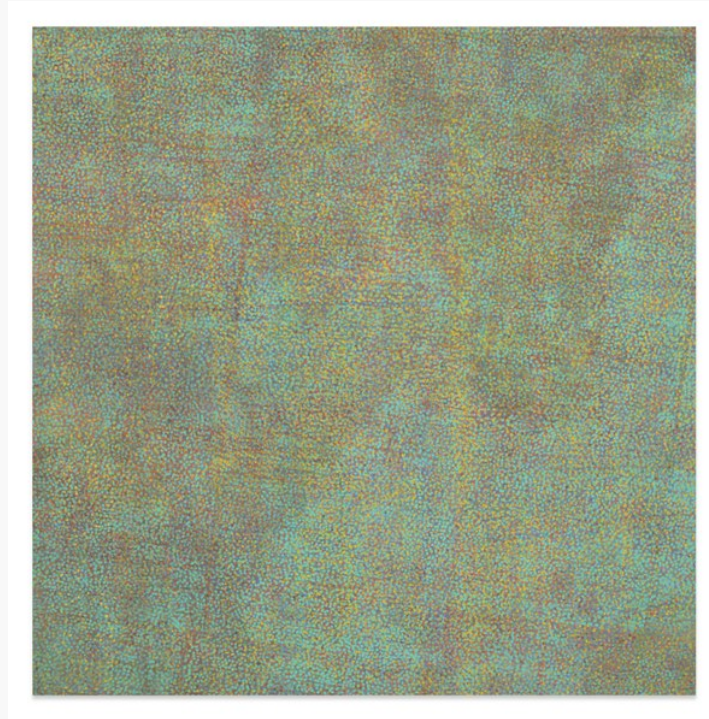




Art made by some 37 African American women from the 19th century until now is the subject of a "powerful" group exhibition at [Sprüth Magers Gallery](#).

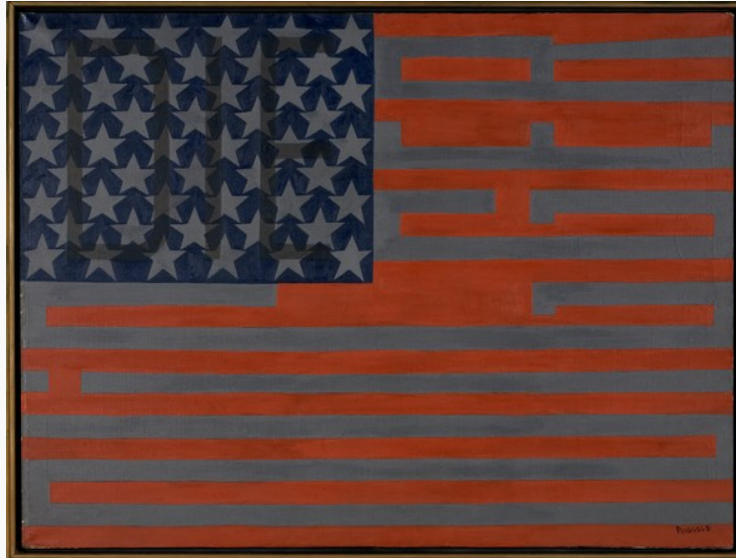
This is art that can rise above categories defined by gender or, for that matter, race, without losing its sense of purpose. Multivalence encourages our sense of inclusion. Viewers can be intrigued by what they are seeing as opposed to what they are being told. An agenda is simply not as enduring as a work of art.



Howardena Pindell, "Untitled," 1971  
Acrylic on canvas, 65 x 66 inches  
Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York

The gallery owners, Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers, are known for their early and consistent support of art made by women so their involvement is no surprise. Organized by art adviser Todd Levin, the show is smartly presented to bring out the best in each work, which is not easy given the size of the show and the diversity of media: painting, photography, sprawling sculptures, videos. There are some Harlem

Renaissance period works and there are some folk-oriented pieces but most of it is post-1960s and contemporary.



Faith Ringgold, "Black Light Series #10: Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger," 1969  
Oil on canvas; 36 x 50 inches  
© Faith Ringgold  
Courtesy of ACA Galleries, New York

Some of the more established artists show older and newer pieces. For example, Faith Ringgold, important as a figure in the Feminist movement of the 1960s, is represented here by the stunning "Black Light Painting #10: Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger" (1969). This painting of the American flag has the stars and stripes subtly altered to spell out the offending word. Riffing off misguided patriotism as well as Jasper Johns, it is riveting.



Betye Saar, "Red Ascension," 2011  
Mixed media assemblage; 17 1/2 x 96 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches  
The artist and Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California

The ninety-year-old Betye Saar, without whom no such show could be complete, includes a small black table bearing a washboard portrait Aunt Jemima but also a 2011

assemblage "Red Ascension." There are radiant abstract paintings by established figures Howardena Pindell and Alma Thomas, photographs by Carrie May Weems, video by Kara Walker, and much more.



Shinique Smith, "Bale Variant No. 0023 (totem)," 2014  
Clothing, fabric, accessories, ribbon, rope and wood; 96 x 20 x 20 inches  
Courtesy David Castillo Gallery

Such well-known or established artists are mixed with younger and emerging talents. Shinique Smith's "Bale Variant No. 0023 (Totem)" (2014), made of colored fabrics massed into a column, has a singular presence while Brenna Youngblood's noble sculpture "X," (2012) made of "tree" — wood tinted in soft black patina— is quietly provocative, suggesting simultaneously Malcolm X and the conventions of modernism.



Brenna Youngblood, "X," 2012  
Tree; 78 1/2 x 47 4/7 x 5 inches  
© Brenna Youngblood  
Courtesy of Honor Fraser Gallery  
Photography © Josh White

Power, as a show, is declarative, not just provocative, taking a stance on the ability of art to survive the slings and arrows of history. It is a refreshing gathering of work that self-confidently assumes that making the art is the best revenge. It is on view through June 10.

Producers:  
[Benjamin Gottlieb](#)