

FALL PREVIEW

# A Constellation of Stars From the Latin Art World

Holland Cotter, co-chief critic, on the bounty of Latin American and Latino art coming our way for the fall and winter season, as well as important shows on South Asian and Indigenous art.

By Holland Cotter

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Of the powerhouse exhibitions headed our way this season, “**Murillo: From Heaven to Earth**” at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (Sept. 18-Jan. 29) heads my list for its title alone. Given the state of our combusting, war-racked planet, we could use some outside help, and in the painterly cosmos of the 17th-century Spanish Baroque painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo it’s there: Angels and saints beam down to succor ordinary folk, and everyone looks touched by grace. A popular art of immense sophistication in a one-stop-only show.

Divine protection and healing will also be the dual dynamic of “**Bamigboye: A Master Sculptor of the Yoruba Tradition**” at the Yale University Art Gallery (Sept. 9-Jan. 8). Harvested from international collections, the show will feature the monumental and fantastically intricate ritual sculptures and masks carved by the Nigerian artist Moshood Olusomo Bamigboye (circa 1885-1975) and his workshop. We get museum solos devoted to Western “masters” all the time; ones devoted to African artists, almost never. Not to be missed.

More modest in scale but of comparable spiritual utility is the work in “**Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings**” at the Drawing Center in Manhattan (Oct. 7-Jan. 15). Produced during the past few years by the 91-year-old, Sudanese-born, British-based artist, the drawings have been his way of coping, psychologically, with late-life chronic pain. All were done on near-at-hand scraps of paper, including the backs of medication labels. El-Salahi’s majestic 2013 London retrospective didn’t make it across the Atlantic, but we’ll get a chance to sample him in depth, if not breadth, here. “**Jimmy DeSana: Submission**” at the Brooklyn Museum (Nov. 11-April 16) will also give us a chance to catch up with another outstanding artist — this one a photographer — who has eluded full-dress institutional attention. Born in Detroit in 1949, DeSana

landed in New York City just in time to chronicle the intertwined punk, No Wave and L.G.B.T.Q. scenes in portraits of its subterranean stars. As AIDS closed in, on the subcultures and on himself, DeSana moved on to making surreal tableaus of mutating bodies and ephemeral objects before his death in 1990.

I first saw the work of the Cuban artist Juan Francisco Elso in a traveling group show of contemporary Latin American art in 1994. His carved figure of the revolutionary Cuban poet José Martí, body caked with mud, glass eyes gleaming, hand gripping a machete like a Diogenes lamp, has haunted me ever since. This work, a cross between a Christian santo and an African power figure, will be included in “**Juan Francisco Elso: Por América,**” a retrospective at El Museo del Barrio (Oct. 27-March 26). Elso, who died of leukemia in 1988 at 32, was one of the greats. The show, organized by Olga Viso, should be too.

Elso will shine like a lodestar in a fall season that brings a constellation of Latin American and Latino art showcases, beginning with “**Sin Autorización: Contemporary Cuban Art**” at the Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University (Oct. 21-Jan. 15). The title, “Without Authorization,” refers to the 2018 Cuban government-issued “Decree 349” that prohibits the making of art that doesn’t meet official approval. The Wallach group show will include several young Cubans who are navigating a path through repression, along with figures — the artists Tania Bruguera and Luis Manuel, the art historian Yanelys Nuñez — who confront it head-on.

At the Whitney Museum of American Art we’ll get a major landmark in “**No Existe un Mundo Poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria**” (Nov. 23-April 23), a group show that throws the spotlight on an island territory politically demeaned and culturally ignored by the United States. That catastrophic 2017 event yielded an indelibly outrageous news image: President Trump tossing rolls of paper towels to a storm-ravaged populace. The Whitney show promises a tough, complex, multivocal response to it.

Other fall entries — “**Tropical Is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime**” at Americas Society in New York (Sept. 7-Dec. 17) and “**Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s-Today**” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Nov. 19-April 23) — will further expand the picture, as will “**Judith F. Baca: World Wall,**” devoted to the eminent Chicana muralist, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (Sept. 10-Feb. 19).

And the archaeologically based show “**Lives of the Gods: Divinity in Maya Art**” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Nov. 21-April 2), with Classic-period ceramic sculptures (A.D. 250-900) from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, will up pick up the divine-meets-human thread.

Finally, I'm mightily intrigued by something called "**Indecencia**" at Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in Manhattan (Sept. 16-Jan. 15). A gathering of queer Latin American and Latino artists who specialize in performance art, it focuses on what the museum describes as a meeting of religion and sexuality, or "theologizing without underwear." Organized by the Dominican-born, Bronx-based conceptualist Nicolás Dumit Estévez Rafal Espejo Ovalles, founding director of the Interior Beauty Salon, it's sure to be of interest at a time when religious belief threatens to dictate public policy in L.G.B.T.Q. matters.

In contrast to this bounty of Latin American and Latino material, art from other parts of the Global South has less presence. For a while, in the multicultural 1990s, we had fairly regular museum loan exhibitions of historical South Asian work. Not so now, which makes "**A Splendid Land: Paintings From Royal Udaipur**" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, D.C., a precious exception. (Nov. 19-May 14). All of its panoramic 18th- and 19th-century images, with their detailed figures, moody landscapes and otherworldly skies, will come directly from India, some exhibited publicly for the first time.

I'm looking forward to "**Speaking With Light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography**" at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth (Oct. 30-Jan. 22), with contributions by such sparks as Sky Hopinka, Wendy Red Star and Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie. Also on my be-there list are surveys of two inventive figures of different generations. "**Fred Eversley: Reflecting Back (the World)**" at the Orange County Museum of Art (Oct. 8-Jan. 2) will give us half a century's worth of optically dynamic abstract work by an aerospace engineer-turned-sculptor, and "**Xaviera Simmons: Crisis Makes a Book Club**" at the Queens Museum (Oct. 2-March 5) will catch an artist of exceptional range at midcareer exploring the entanglement of white supremacy and capitalism.

Mere decades ago, the chances that Eversley or Simmons, as African American artists, would have had museum shows at all were slim. And that might still be the case but for the fact that, in 1974, the art dealer Linda Goode Bryant opened Just Above Midtown, a Black-owned gallery and experimental space on 57th Street in Manhattan. "**Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces,**" at the Museum of Modern Art this fall (Oct. 9-Feb. 18), pays tribute to her and to the gallery with displays of archival material and works by people she showed, David Hammons, Lorraine O'Grady and Howardena Pindell among them. Bryant's ardent support of JAM artists' lives and careers was, and continues to be, of incalculable benefit to American art itself.

Talk about angels.