

“Peter Saul: Crime and Punishment” New Museum

The timeliest as well as the rudest painting show of this winter happens to be the first-ever New York museum survey of this American aesthetic rapsallion. Recognition so delayed bemuses almost as much as a reminder of the artist’s current age: eighty-five, which seems impossible. Saul’s cartoony style—raucously grotesque, often with contorted figures engaged in (and quite enjoying) intricate violence, caricatures of politicians from Nixon to Trump that come off as much fond as fierce, and cheeky travesties of classic paintings by Rembrandt, Picasso, and de Kooning—suggests the gall of an adolescent allowed to run amok. It takes time to become aware of how well Saul paints, with lyrically kinetic, intertwined forms and an improbable approximation of chiaroscuro, managed with neon-toned Day-Glo acrylics. He sneaks whispery formal nuances into works whose predominant effect may be as subtle as that of a steel garbage can being kicked downstairs. Not everyone takes the time. Saul’s effrontery has long driven fastidious souls, including me years ago, from galleries. Now I see him as part of a story of art and culture that has been unspooling since the nineteen-fifties; one in which Saul, formerly a pariah, seems ever more a paladin.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Through May 31.)*

“Vida Americana” Whitney Museum

The subtitle of this thumpingly great show, “Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1924-1945,” picks an overdue art-historical fight. The usual story of American art in those two decades revolves around young, often immigrant aesthetes striving to absorb European modernism. A triumphalist tale composed backward from its climax—the postwar success of Abstract Expressionism—it brushes aside the prevalence, in the thirties, of politically themed figurative art: social realism, more or less, which became ideologically toxic with the onset of the Cold War. What to do with the mighty legacy of the time’s big three Mexican painters, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros? As little as possible has seemed the rule, despite the seminal influence of Orozco and Siqueiros on the young Jackson Pollock. But, with some two hundred works by sixty artists and abundant documentary material, the curator Barbara Haskell reweaves the sense and sensations of the era to bring it alive. Without the Mexican precedents of amplified scale and passionate vigor, the development of Abstract Expressionism in general, and that of Pollock in particular, lacks crucial sense. As for the politics, consider the persistently leftward tilt of American art culture ever since—a residual hankering, however sotto voce, to change the world.—*P.S. (Through May 17.)*

Feliciano Centurión Americas Society

UPTOWN This Paraguayan artist, who was based in Buenos Aires, left behind a substantial and stunning body of work in 1996, when he died, of AIDS-related complications, at the age of thirty-four. His paintings on fabric and pillows (among other textiles) utilize sentimentality—in registers both earnest and edgy—with nuanced intensity. In Centurión’s first exhibition in the U.S., curated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, queer aesthetics mingle with folk traditions of South America to poignant, sometimes dramatic effect. The show opens with sea-creature-themed compositions, from the early nineteen-nineties, that make ingenious use of the existing geometries of bedding, a material whose fraught, domestic allusions Centurión played with throughout his career. In the arresting “Cordero Sacrificado” (“Sacrificed Lamb”), from 1996, a dark blanket flecked with yellow paint provides a cosmic backdrop for the title’s ritual scene. Many of the smaller works here feature hand-stitched texts that range in tone from aphoristic and spiritual to observational, including the carefully embroidered, heartrendingly simple phrase “Mis glóbulos rojos aumentan” (“My red-blood-cell count increases”).—*Johanna Fateman (Through May 16.)*

Thomas Kovachevich Callicoon

DOWNTOWN This artist, who is also a physician, paints imaginary organisms on black backgrounds of corrugated plastic—the effect is of bacterial-botanical hybrids floating in outer space. “Sanctuary,” from 2017, suggests a rootless tropical tree sprouting peptide chains and mitochondria; the flowering fuchsia and gold tentacles of “Pink/Green,” from 2016, appear subaquatic. Whatever his subject, Kovachevich paints with palpable delight. The show also includes geometric installations, which are unlikely, if lovely, complements to the strange, verdant paintings. In one minimal work, forty-nine small squares of paper are pinned to the wall in a grid, curling like petals—a poetic symbol of mutability and impermanence that reflects a passion for the natural world.—*J.F. (Through March 8.)*

Shannon Cartier Lucy Lubov

DOWNTOWN Ten years ago, this painter left New York and moved back to her native Nashville. Her first show since then features six bad-dream scenes, rendered with melancholic delicacy in a faded Kodachrome palette. The gallery’s close quarters heighten the air of claustrophobia in such works as “Naptime,” in which the contents of a bedroom—including a woman asleep on a bed—are seen wrapped in plastic, and “My Signature Act,” which captures the tension of a parlor trick (in which two hands play the piano while balancing a mug and a pencil), with the gloomy gravitas of a Rembrandt. The highlight of Lucy’s comeback is the creamily painted, crystalline image of goldfish whose bowl rests, alarmingly, on the lavender flame of a gas stove.—*J.F. (Through March 8.)*

NIGHT LIFE

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it’s advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Cam’ron Sony Hall

Aging in music is difficult in general, but it’s particularly complicated in hip-hop, where legends can struggle to get ears (or simply respect) alongside their own progeny. Cam’ron is one of the rare exceptions: his debut album dropped in 1998, and he has maintained a consistent cultural presence since. His seventh album, “Purple Haze 2,” arrived in December, nearly fifteen years to the day after its predecessor, which is widely heralded as the rapper’s apex. The latest is molded in the image of the past, but it still offers a reminder of the qualities—a sense of humor intertwined with fascinating skill—that made Cam such a favorite in the first place.—*Briana Younger (March 4.)*

Andy Statman Barbès

An Orthodox Jew walks into the back room of a bar and proceeds to play avant-garde jazz on the clarinet and bluegrass on the mandolin, among much else. Welcome to the manifold musical world of Andy Statman, who, in his frequent visits to this long-standing Park Slope watering hole and music space, proves that New York has always been the place to be if multiculturalism is the air you breathe.—*Steve Futterman (March 4.)*

Joan Osborne Café Carlyle

Artists from far outside the world of cabaret have successfully infiltrated the current Café Carlyle roster. Among the once unlikely is the alt-rock songstress Joan Osborne, best known for her ubiquitous 1995 hit “One of Us.” She draws on the work of the great, unclassifiable songwriter Tom Waits at this engagement.—*S.F. (March 4-7.)*

070 Shake Webster Hall

There’s no use trying to box in 070 Shake: her music effortlessly slips in and out of genres, annexing influences as varied as contemporary hip-hop, eighties glam rock, and hazy synth pop. Her recent debut, “Modus Vivendi,” serves as a formal introduction to the New Jersey native and her unique and fluid artistic vision for those who might only know her from Kanye West’s album “Ye.” If this release is any indication, 070 Shake is certainly one to follow, as the possible destinations are boundless.—*B.Y. (March 5.)*

Ivan Smaghe Public Records

The French electro and house staple Ivan Smaghe came to the fore of clubland in the mid-two-thousands—as a producer, for his work with the group Black Strobe, and as a