THE NEW YORKER

## ART

### Diedrick Brackens

This Los Angeles-based artist's splendid, emotionally lush show, at the Shainman gallery, is a celebration of a subject that hasn't been championed much in American art—namely, Black men, seen joyfully alone and together. Brackens's handwoven tapestries bring to mind the traditions of both West African textiles and American quilting; his elongated figures occupy colorful spaces that enhance their implied movement and propulsive energy. Looking at these unabashedly romantic works, one is reminded of their obvious influences—the cutout silhouettes in Henri Matisse's "Jazz" series, the lives commemorated in the ongoing AIDS Memorial Quilt project. Nearly twenty years ago, Thelma Golden, now the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, curated the landmark exhibition "Black Romantic: The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary African-American Art," and it's wonderful to see how the ideas it identified—about dreams as they relate to Black lives—are still being explored, and so fully.—*Hilton Als (jackshainman.com)*

### Highwaymen

Terms such as "kitsch" and "motel painting" would likely not have rubbed the Highwaymen the wrong way. The silhouetted palm trees, sunsets, and moonlit seascapes painted in Florida by this informal group of twenty-six self-taught Black artists were made to be sold at affordable prices, ideally in bulk, door to door or from their cars along the roadside, hence the group's name. In the decades since they started working, in the nineteen-fifties, their art has gained increasing attention as a lush, savvy genre of folk art—or a populist strain of Pop. The Highwaymen tapped into a heady vision of American landscape and décor, fantasy aesthetics born of the postwar abundance they were largely denied during the Jim Crow era. The eleven paintings on view at the Charles Moffett gallery represent just a sliver of the artists' prodigious (and often anonymous and undated) output. But it's enough to relay the range of their enchanting style, from a wetland vista at dusk by Mary Ann Carroll, the sole Highwaywoman, in which tropical foliage appears as dark tracery against a streaked, blazing sky, to the cotton-candy clouds and buttery touch in a pair of canvases by Harold Newton, which evoke Fragonard in the Everglades.—*Johanna Fateman (charlesmoffett.com)*

### Lynn Hershman Leeson

The dystopian prescience of this pioneering American artist stands apart from that of other Cassandras: she isn't afraid to embrace new technologies that raise challenging ethical questions. "Twisted," Hershman Leeson's current retrospective at the New Museum, gathers together fifty years of her experimentations in the Bay Area, where she is based. Cast-wax masks made in the sixties—at once macabre and delightful—breathe when triggered by motion detectors, prefiguring the artist's long-standing interest in surveillance and interactivity. More recently, in 2017, she created two antibodies, working with a scientist at Novartis Pharmaceuticals. Between these endeavors lies an enthralling, varied body of work—drawing, sculpture, filmmaking, Internet art—united by her idiosyncratic futurism. As technology has evolved, so, too, have both the look and the content of Hershman Leeson's art; of the many through lines in her retrospective, several are very intentionally highlighted. From 1973 to 1978, Hershman Leeson created the fictional identity Roberta Breitmore through a series of public performances, beauty rituals, and bureaucratic records. Some forty years later, Roberta was resurrected in the form of the artist's genetically engineered antibody ERTA, a poetic redemption of Roberta's "life," which was initially conceived as a feminist deconstruction of identity.—*J.F. (newmuseum.org)*

### "The New Woman Behind the Camera"

This monumental show at the Met—a hundred and eighty-five works, made between the nineteen-twenties and the fifties, by a hundred and twenty female photographers from more than twenty countries—builds a case for the historic contributions of women to a field that, until very recently, was monotonously dominated by men. Genres include reportage, ethnography, fashion, advertising, and determinedly avant-garde experimentation. Widely recognized names (the Americans Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, and Helen Levitt among them) are few. The array of images tantalizes to the point of possibly maddening some viewers. Now for something that brought tears to my eyes: five shots of a Japanese actress, Yasue Yamamoto, taken in secret, around 1943 and 1944, after her theatre company was banned by Japan's wartime government. Yamamoto's tiny shifts of facial expression speak or, really, sing of muted emotions that are no less moving for being unidentifiable. The pictures are by the pioneering Japanese photographer Eiko Yamazawa, whose style is flatly vernacular, with nothing overtly dramatizing about it; timelessly here-and-now across a span of sixty-eight years, they didn't so much blow my mind as take it away and begin to replace it with a better one.—*Peter Schjeldahl (metmuseum.org)*

## AT THE GALLERIES

COURTESY DENNY DIMIN GALLERY

In the early nineteen-seventies, a group of American artists who shared an unironic love of craft, vivid color, and kitsch—rebels against the ornamentation-averse restraint of the Minimalists—became known as the Pattern and Decoration movement (a.k.a. P&D). By the mid-eighties, the initial enthusiasm, mostly in Europe, for the group's paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and textiles had waned. Individual artists succeeded, but P&D was written off as a footnote that was slightly embarrassing. (And also threatening: it's no coincidence that the group's focus on needlework, floral imagery, and other hallmarks of domesticity aligned it with feminism.) Today, when a loom is as good as a paintbrush to a young artist, the movement is back in the spotlight. The historical survey "With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1985" is installed at the Hessel Museum, at Bard College, through Nov. 28. A more intimate and entirely irresistible group show—cleverly titled **"Fringe"**—is on view at the Denny Dimin gallery through Aug. 20. It mixes original P&D artists (in charming pieces, from 1976, by Cynthia Carlson and Ree Morton and a sinuous 2020 canvas by Valerie Jaudon) with others whose works make a strong case for the movement's ongoing relevance, including the quilted irreverence of Natalie Baxter's "Housecoat III" (in the foreground, above), completed this year.—*Andrea K. Scott*


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