

3 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Corita Kent's "Heroes and Sheroes"; Igshaan Adams's tapestries and wire sculptures; and Tammy Nguyen's portraits of Forest City.

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Corita Kent

Through Aug. 13. Andrew Kreps, 22 Cortlandt Alley, Manhattan; (212) 741-8849, andrewkreps.com.

Corita Kent, also known as Sister Mary Corita, was pretty famous for a nun. She headlined a 1967 Newsweek article about the state of the American convent, and she worked on major commercial advertising campaigns to raise money for her order's Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, where she taught art. (Kent left the order in 1968 at the age of 50 and died in 1986.)

She was also a prolific artist. In screen-print collages and text art, she combined her passionate interest in social justice with a kind of earnestness about language, and about her own stated creed, which is rare to encounter anywhere, let alone in the art world. (Maybe you could call it "good faith.")

"Heroes and Sheroes" at Andrew Kreps Gallery is New York's first complete showing of a series Kent made in '68 and '69. Using found imagery, mostly from the news media, loud colors, and often handwritten texts, Kent worked through the decade's moral catastrophes — the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Vietnam War. She might juxtapose a Vietcong guerrilla being arrested with a diagram of a slave ship and a few lines of a Whitman poem. Or she might set a simple image of a flower above the phrase, "Hope is believing that there has to be an 'I' in 'daisy.'" Either way, the effect is as direct, and as devastating, as a sledgehammer blow.

The whole show, which is accompanied by a generous roundup of other text and media art, is extraordinary. But the piece I kept returning to was "Pieta 1969," a Mardi Gras-colored study of Mary cradling Jesus's lifeless body above a letter one of Kent's students wrote her about Robert Kennedy. "It is so easy to fall apart when surrounded by destruction," the student observed. "Now I can see what you meant when you said we have to create. It's the only thing we can do."

WILL HEINRICH

Igshaan Adams

Through July 30. Casey Kaplan Gallery. 121 West 27th Street, Manhattan; (212) 645-7335, caseykaplangallery.com.



Igshaan Adams's tapestry "Nagtreis op n Vliende Perd (a night journey on a winged horse)," from 2021. Igshaan Adams and Casey Kaplan Gallery

The South African artist Igshaan Adams grew up in the working-class township of Bonteheuwel, near Cape Town, during the twilight years of apartheid. Born Muslim and raised by Christian grandparents, Adams, who is mixed race, weaves visual elements from these traditions in dazzling combinations that illuminate their interconnected histories.

For his first solo exhibition at Casey Kaplan Gallery, “Veld Wen,” (“to gain ground” in Afrikaans), Adams presents 10 richly textured tapestries and nestlike wire sculptures that, like the shimmering assemblages of El Anatsui, incorporate organic and synthetic flotsam, including shells, stones and nylon rope. Pinned loosely to the gallery walls, the tapestries bear abstract geometric patterns that often appear like maps, as with the archipelagic design of “Nagtreis op n Vliende Perd (a night journey on a winged horse),” from 2021, with its midnight blue expanse studded with bright stars.

The inspiration for these patterns are the linoleum flooring found in a typical Bonteheuwel home. Worn by use over time and torn out, the floors meld histories in sedimented layers, producing palimpsests that Adams has ingeniously transposed into warp and weft and dotted with glinting metallic chains and glass beads. Interspersed among these tapestries are the knotted wire sculptures, hung throughout the gallery like suspended tumbleweeds. They trace a longer history, too, alluding to the clouds of dust made by the Nama people, the artist’s grandparents among them, during a traditional celebratory performance known as the Rieldans. Adams invites his viewers to take in the craftsmanship and lineage of his works simultaneously, demonstrating that an artist can successfully merge national and personal narrative without reducing the complexity of either.

TAUSIF NOOR

Tammy Nguyen

Through Aug. 8. Smack Mellon, 92 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn; (718) 834-8761, smackmellon.org.

Tammy Nguyen’s “Seasons of Revolution 4,” from 2021. Tammy Nguyen and Smack Mellon

With a recent tropical storm causing floods in the East Coast and a drought and heat wave in the West, it’s as timely as ever to be thinking about climate change. Three solo shows at Smack Mellon consider the topic, my favorite of which, by Tammy Nguyen, uses painting and printmaking to emphasize how entangled it is with capitalism and geopolitics.

Nguyen’s exhibition is titled “Freehold” in reference to Forest City, a real estate development being built on four man-made islands in Malaysia. Forest City markets itself as a technologically advanced, environmentally friendly tax-free capitalist utopia. When the artist visited in 2019, a salesperson told her, “No climate change here.”

Nguyen designed an unofficial flag for Forest City featuring a white circle — the sun — and 12 blue and green stripes that represent land and water in harmony. The flag anchors “Freehold” as a symbol of artificial, almost parodic calm, in contrast with the carefully orchestrated and wonderfully compelling visual chaos of the rest

of Nguyen's work.

Figure and ground are barely distinguishable in Nguyen's prints and paintings. Instead, she creates riotous meshes of images and techniques. In "Seasons of Revolution 1 — 4," the flag is jumbled with vegetation and different flora and fauna associated with leisure, like shrimp; another series depicts archetypes: a Marlboro man, a spa-going Medusa, and a King Kong-like ape. In all the pieces, various elements compete for primacy, but it's the plants — more traditionally viewed as backdrops — that seem to be winning. Nguyen suggests that there's no such thing as "no climate change," and if we try to beat nature, we'll end up surrendering to it.

JILLIAN STEINHAUER