

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

‘Samaritans,’ an evocative show by 16 artists; Bonnie Collura’s ‘princes’; Carol Rama’s arresting watercolors; and Rachelle Mozman Solano’s takes on Gauguin.

Feb. 12, 2019

Bonnie Collura and Rachelle Mozman Solano

Through Feb. 24. Smack Mellon, 92 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn; 718 834-8761, smackmellon.org.



Works by Bonnie Collura in her show “Prince,” all from 2018. From left, “Skin of a Dancing Ghost: Jesus”; “Matriarch/Heavy Metal/Jesus”; “Guardian Blue” (one of four Color Codes); Mortality/Evening/Lincoln”; and “Skin of a Dancing Ghost: Lincoln.” via Smack Mellon; Etienne Frossard

The word “patriarchy” once seemed like a worn-out term bandied about by 1970s feminists, but it’s making a comeback as authoritarian leaders around the globe, and their followers, try [to overturn any advances made by women](#). You sense the importance of this word in two terrific shows at Smack Mellon: [Bonnie Collura’s “Prince”](#) and Rachelle Mozman Solano’s [“Metamorphosis of Failure.”](#)

Ms. Collura emerged in the ’90s with [post-Pop sculptures inspired](#) by amusement park doodads, but she’s recently gone soft, making human figures with found fabric and other materials. Several of her fiber sculptures are strung from the ceiling, creating an eerie suggestion of just what she’d like to do with some of her subjects. But her titles often refer to Christian martyrs (St. Sebastian, Jesus) and revered leaders (Lincoln), alluding to the complex nature of men cast as “princes.” Complicated and antiheroic, Ms. Collura’s work takes patriarchy down a peg (symbolically, at least).



“Opaque Mirror,” 2017, a single-channel color video by Rachelle Mozman Solano in the exhibition “Metamorphosis of Failure.” Credit Rachelle Mozman Solano and Smack Mellon

Ms. Mozman Solano focuses on a single man: Paul Gauguin, a towering figure in Post-Impressionist art, also known for his ugly colonialist behavior in the South Pacific (that is, having sex with very young women and infecting them with syphilis). Gauguin’s exoticizing gaze and behavior are turned back on themselves in a series of canny photographs and collages and a video in which actors recreate Gauguin’s paintings — as well as grab the camera, turning it back on the artist.

Quoting Gauguin's writings and those of Georgia O'Keeffe, who was photographed by her lover Alfred Stieglitz, Ms. Mozman Solano questions the acts of portraiture and representation. Her work also delves into Gauguin's bicultural biography in a way that is just as nuanced as Ms. Collura's thinking about "princes": Gauguin, who was half Peruvian and half French, was still obsessed with ideas of racial purity and the conquered aristocracy of the Pacific Islanders. Where Ms. Collura's sculptures are silent and deadly, Ms. Mozman Solano makes the brown-skinned descendants and spiritual sisters of Gauguin's subjects speak, giving a previously marginalized population a voice and, as women around the world are doing now, challenging the men who would abuse or silence them.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER