ART

which was smuggling several hundred migrants into the United States, ran aground near Rock-
away Beach; many of its passengers spent years in prison. Working in the folk-art tradition of
zheshi, the detainees created these often play-
ful, sometimes wistful works to reflect their his-
tories and aspirations. A group of bright sail-
boats—their hulls composed of meticulously
folded yellow paper from legal pads supplied by
their pro-bono attorneys—bear such glad tid-
ings as “Love” and “Beauty.” Several bald eag-
les, arranged before a banner that reads “Free-
dom,” convey the hopeful adoption of American
symbols of freedom and life. The work is both a
defense of these cultures as springboards for a
larger discussion of immigration policy. Though
President Clinton released the final Golden Venture
migrants in 1997, the artists featured here chose
to remain anonymous, because, after decades,
their legal status in the U.S. remains uncertain.
Through Mar. 25.

Queens Museum

“Patty Chang: The Wandering Lake”

Since the nineteen-nineties, the American art-
ist has been investigating gendered family roles
and stereotypes of Asian femininity in dead-
pan and visually lush performance-based work. In
her new installation, which encompasses video, installation, photography, and sculpture, Chang documents her travels to
China, Fogo Island, and the fast-shrinking Aral
Sea. Bleak landscapes illustrate catastrophic
geopolitical shifts and provide poetic backdrops
for momentous personal events. In large projec-
tions, we watch Chang write or abandon fish-
kins, in keeping with the shape of a whale; in a video ti-
tled “Que Sera, Sera,” which is more intimate in
each size and tone, she sings to her infant son in
a hospital room where her father lies dying. Ac-
companying a three-part lecture-performance,
which incorporates footage from a trip along
the South-to-North Water Diversion Project,
in China, are dozens of handblown glass objects
that the artist calls “urinary devices,” absurdist
ribs on the plastic bottles she had to use as por-
table urinals during her journey. The piece epit-
omizes Chang’s gift for breathing humor into
her rebellious takes on profound, even heart-
breaking, subjects. Through Feb. 18.

Studio Museum in Harlem

“Fictions”

This lively exhibition, the museum’s fifth in a se-
ries of surveys of new tendencies in art, presents
nineteen emerging artists of African descent. As
the title suggests, many works imagine fantas-
tic or speculative worlds. The painter Christina
Quartes depicts a surreal scene in which slum-
bering figures occupy parallel planes of exis-
tence, delineated by contrasting patterns. Mi-
chael Demp’s nearby sculpture—a tilted obelisk
supported by scaffolding—is inspired by medi-
evial alchemy; its rough, gray surface of candle
wax and electromagnetic crystals will morph in
response to light. The multimedia videos and hum-
dings that take up the show. A few installation works stand out as
anchors, including Allison Janae Hamilton’s
immersive “Forest,” which conjures a mythical
wood with birch logs, horsehair, and a video of raindrops projected on to a wall of tambourines.
In Paul Stephen Benjamin’s “God Bless Amer-
ica,” dozens of stacked monitors flash, playing
video clips including Aretha Franklin singing
at Jimmy Carter’s Inauguration and Lil Wayne’s
“God Bless America” video, from 2015, a des-
olate riff on the original song. Benjamin’s lay-
ered meditation on the African-American ex-
perience implies that the “fiction” may be that

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

“All Good Art Is Political: Käthe Kollwitz and Sue Cole”

This cracking show, titled after a quote from
Toni Morrison, displays prints and drawings
by Kollwitz, a German social realist who died in
1945, and Cole, an English antiwar, anti-capitalist
rights illustrator who lives in upstate New York. From opposite ends of the twentieth
century, they prove the capacity of art, when
both impassioned and adept, to dramatize
worldly injustice with fury and flair. Kollwitz
is the more appealing, with a style of masterly
touch and tender paths, notably in delicately
shaped images of mothers and children indom-
itantly bound in poverty or facing unspecified
threats. Cole makes a burnt offering of her own
fine artistic gifts by cultivating an ugliness to
beft the targets of her rage, including military
and sexual violence and, especially, the horrors
of industrial slaughterhouses, which, starting
in the late nineteen-eighties, she spent several
years researching. In this show, both artists have
as-
signed themselves an evergreen social mission:
to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the com-
fortable. Through Feb. 10. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24
W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)

“London Painters”

The American-born painter R. B. Kitaj coined
the term “School of London,” in the nine-
teen-seventies, to describe a socially and pro-
fessionally linked group of artists, most of them
English, who were devoted to the then unfash-
ionable practice of figurative painting. Works by
seven of those artists, made between 1944 and
2014, are on view here, including a watercolor,
paper self-portrait by Lucian Freud and Fran-
cis Bacon’s still stunning canvas “Study after
Velázquez,” from 1950, in which the ghostly out-
line of Pope Innocent X is seen screaming, awash
in bloodred stripes. Staking out turf that edges
even deeper into quasi-abstraction are Leon Kos-
soff’s brash cityscape “Stormy Summer Day,
Dalston,” and Anthony McCall’s “Dance,” in which
a maze of wrinkled ridges, and Frank Auer-
bach’s “Head of J.Y.M. II,” an intimate, largely
blackandwhite portrait that induces a rolling
vertigo reminiscent of the best work of Chaim
Soutine. Striking a more joyful note is David
Hockney’s bright backyard scene “Montalcin
Pool, Los Angeles.” Through Jan. 18. (Ordovas, 9
E. 77th St. 212-576-8870.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Lee Krasner

Working in her late husband Jackson Pollock’s
East Hampton studio, often at night, in the years
following his accidental death, in 1956, Krasner
produced twenty-four paintings in a series she
titled “Umber,” five of which are on view in this small but powerful show. They’re
rough and explosive abstractions in which thick
strokes of black, brown, and offwhite jostle against the edges of the canvas. One another.
While the works clearly suggest an artist try-
ing to externalize grief, there’s a joyful aspect
to them, too. In the center of a brown storm of
brushstrokes spattered with creamy blotsches,
titled “Eucundity,” several curving black lines
ocks up the expansive feeling of gracefully open-
ning arms. Through Jan. 13. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth
Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

“The Estate of General Idea”

General Idea was founded in Toronto, in 1969,
by the artists AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge
Zontal. The group is best known for its work ad-
ressing the AIDS crisis (Partz and Zontal both
died from the disease in 1994), which made novel
use of popculture forms, such as replacing the
“LOVE” on Robert Indiana’s famous red, green,
and blue sculpture with the word AIDS. This
show introduces viewers to the group’s less well-
known paintings: hardedged, fluorescent,
metric abstractions that evoke the pixelated sil-
houettes of eightbit video games. They also
allude to the mystical and political significance
of stepped architecture in ancient societies, from
Mesopotamia to the Mayans, where such struc-
tures were thought to lead to the gods. Exhibited
alongside the paintings are plans for the “The
1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion,” an absurdist
beautypageant venue that, per the artists’ lore,
had burned to the ground, leaving only the foot-
print of a zigzag. Through Jan. 13. (Mitchell-
Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

“Insiders: Henry Ray Clark and Frank Jones”

Forget the obsolete term “outsider artist.” This
show makes a compelling case for two self-taught
artists as “insiders,” based on their representa-
tions of fantastical interior realms—and because
they were both incarcerated at Huntsville State
Penitentiary in Texas. Clark lived in Huntsville in
1977, used markers on manila envelopes to de-
tract a pantheon of characters, announced in the
works’ titles—“I Am Vaavka,” “I Am Time”—with stylized faces at the center of each composi-
tion, surrounded by ornate, geometric borders.
Jones, who served three prison terms between
1958 and 1964, favored elongated structures against
blank backgrounds. “Mellentile House—High
Class People” is characteristic of his style, in
which each line is heavily embellished in red and
blue pencil. The festive appearance of Jones’s
works belie their significance to the artist, who
believed that the act of drawing could trap the
spirits that haunted him. Through Jan. 13. (Ricco/
Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-4819.)

“The Shadow Archive: An Investigation Into
Vernacular Portrait Photography”

The first in a multiyear series of shows about
photographs made for commercial or practi-
cal purposes, curated by Brian Wallis, consid-
ers the portrait. Most of the images date to the
nineteenth century; all of them fit into typolo-
gies. Fifteen tints of “workers with toolspnof their trade” include a barber, a piano tuner, and
a sword swallow; several mug shots attributed to
the California sheriff Thomas Cunningham are
so picturesque that they could be mistaken for
stills from a Hollywood period piece. Many of the
images take fulllength portraits and cut out the heads, leaving behind
accidental studies of fashion. A mesmerizing
series of such discs, shown here, were taken
against a red background in Gulu, Uganda, and
collected by the Italianborn journalist Mar-
tina Bacigalupo. A found group of fortyeight
portrait photographs of African village women,
holding up a paper number—their source is un-
known—takes the idea of identifying documents in
a more chilling direction. Through March 31.
(Walker Collection, 526 W. 26th St. 212352-0683.)

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