

CULTURED

‘Retinal Hysteria,’ the Latest Exhibition Curated by Robert Storr, Is Meant to Provoke You

The show—featuring work by artists like Deborah Kass, Peter Saul, and Woody De Othello—spans Venus Over Manhattan’s two gallery spaces and delves into the more unsightly spectrum of emotions.

Melissa Smith November 16, 2023



Peter Saul, *Life Is Tuff*, 2023.

All images courtesy of the artists and Venus Over Manhattan.

When Robert Storr was curating the 2007 Venice Biennale, he wanted people to see that art doesn’t have to be tasteful. Anything but, actually. He wrote, “Looking at, and thinking about, contemporary art demands appetite and a tolerance for things that may cause irritation as much, or more than, they do taste.” His latest show, “Retinal Hysteria,” which opens today across Venus Over Manhattan’s two spaces on Great Jones Street, continues to poke at this declaration.



Robert Storr, *Party Animal 1*, 1980.

Storr has been examining the more distasteful elements of art throughout his career, dating back to a 1996 exhibition he organized while still a curator at MoMA called “Deformations: Aspects of the Modern Grotesque.” That presentation zeroed in on mostly modern artists; Storr put a contemporary spin on the theme with “Disparities and Deformations: Our Grotesque,” at SITE Santa Fe in 2004.

“Retinal Hysteria” is inspired by a show that nearly 25 years ago brought together five American artists who employed humor and caricature to delve into the more “unsightly aspects of contemporary life.” The seminal “Eye Infection” was curated by Christiaan Braun for Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum and squarely addressed Storr’s preoccupation with the power of disconcerting imagery.



Robert Colescott, *6 Witnesses*, 1968. Photography by Josh Schaedel.
Image courtesy of The Trust and Blum.

Similarly, the work Storr selected for this show—which is anchored by pieces from R. Crumb, Jim Nutt, and Peter Saul, three of the five artists in “Eye Infection”—tends to, as a statement from the gallery claims, “irritate, provoke, and unsettle.”

The genre that the artist uses to scratch that itch doesn’t matter to him. The disorientation could stem from a pop-inspired painting, like in a piece by Deborah Kass (whose *OY/ YO* work has been thrilling passersby at the Brooklyn Museum since 2018) to an abstract work by Robert Colescott. The show is chock full of paintings and drawings, from heavyweights like Louise Bourgeois and Keiichi Tanaami, to those newer to the scene, like Chibuike Uzoma and Ana Benaroya.



Woody De Othello, *Disbelief*, 2023. Additionally courtesy of Karma.

Among the 80 plus pieces from over 40 artists, Storr includes a fascinating one-off: a ceramic by Woody De Othello. *Disbelief*, 2023, depicts two distorted hands grabbing a vase that sits atop a box, itself propped on a stool. It's amusing and unsettling, imbued with an element of uncertainty. The mixed emotions that the work induces echo Storr's hope for every piece in the show: to rile people up.

"Retinal Hysteria" is on view through January 13, 2024 at Venus Over Manhattan in New York.

find this article: <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2023/11/16/robert-storr-retinal-hysteria-show>