

# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Met Breuer

#### "Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body"

This is a mind-blowing show, hypercharged with sensation and glutted with instruction. You may be torn between praising it as visionary (and also a great deal of fun, what with entertainments including a voluble animatronic savant) and reporting it as a mugging to the taste police. A hundred and twenty-seven almost exclusively European and American renditions of human bodies, from very old to recent and from masterpieces to curios, elaborate the thesis that colored figurative sculpture has been unjustly bastardized ever since the Renaissance canonized a mistake made during its excited revival of antiquity. The whiteness of surviving Greek and Roman marbles, their original polychromy lost, became de rigueur for Western three-dimensional figuration in subsequent centuries. Great works in the exhibition range from an anonymous German's "Nellingen Crucifix," from

1430-35, and Donatello's "Bust of Niccolò da Uzzano," from the fourteen-thirties, to contemporary sculptures by Jeff Koons ("Michael Jackson and Bubbles," from 1988) and Charles Ray ("Aluminum Girl," completed in 2003). Crowd-pleasing curiosities include the "Auto-Icon of Jeremy Bentham," from 1832. Sitting on a chair, the realistic wax-faced figure, jauntily clothed and sporting a cane, contains the British philosopher's skeleton. The effect is at once scholarly and populist, like that of a TED talk. *Through July 22.*

### Whitney Museum

#### "Zoe Leonard: Survey"

The American artist's strangely beautiful, unpretentiously intimate, and adamantly political work is the subject of this powerful show, a nuanced selection of photographs, punctuated by rescued-object sculptures and text. Carefully structured, on the museum's fifth floor, in seven parts, the survey includes a hundred-and-four-foot-long collection of vintage postcards of Niagara Falls; color shots of New York's vanished mom-and-pop

shops, printed in the now obsolete dye-transfer process; and a subversively entertaining archive of photographs of Fae Richards, a black lesbian actress from the nineteen-thirties, which is so lushly convincing you'll be shocked to learn it's a fiction. Some of Leonard's subjects go unnoticed because they're mundane, the way nature becomes incidental in cities (eight pictures document trees, resilient survivors that have grown enmeshed with the metal fences around them). Others are rendered invisible when society turns a blind eye. Between 1992 and 1995, Leonard memorialized victims of the AIDS epidemic in the coruscating installation "Strange Fruit," discarded peels of citrus, avocado, and bananas, their bruised skins painstakingly made whole again with sinew, zippers, buttons, and thread. Seen in 2018, the tenderly devotional project assumes new dimensions—a meditation on bodies violated by gun violence and police brutality, and on the redemptive power of love. *Through June 10.*

### American Folk Art Museum

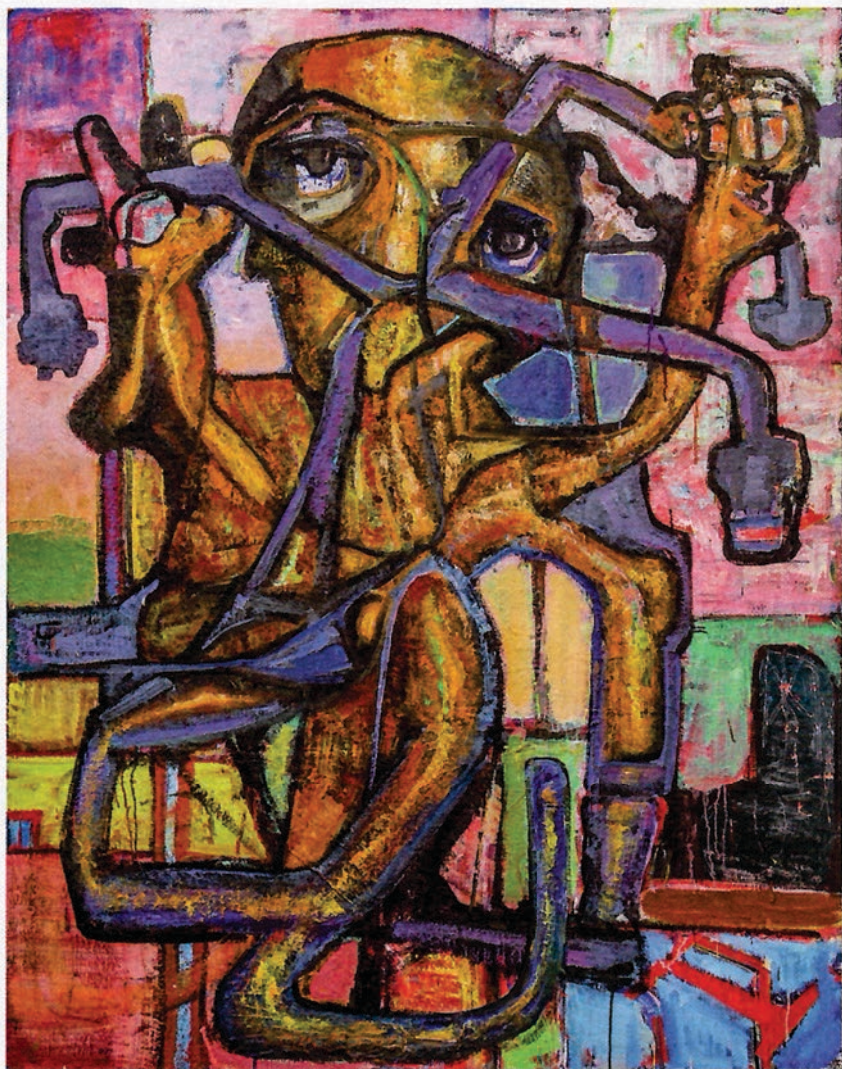
#### "Vestiges & Verse: Notes from the Newfangled Epic"

More than a few self-taught artists have invented grand narratives. One was the Chicago janitor Henry Darger, who became a posthumous legend (he died in 1973) after the discovery of his fifteen-thousand-page illustrated epic, "The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." Displayed in a long vitrine, it serves as the spine of this arresting show of two hundred and fifty works by twenty-one artists, all consumed for years by their projects. None are storytellers in any conventional sense. Achilles G. Rizzoli, an architectural draftsman in San Francisco by day, made intricate drawings of unbuildable Beaux-Arts buildings. In Minneapolis, Richard Saholt, a veteran of the Second World War, made collages from magazines to convey his mistreatment by Veterans Administration doctors. Agatha Wojciechowski, who moved to New York as a German-speaking nanny and later became a medium, made drawings she believed were guided by spirits. Paul Laffoley, a onetime grad student at Harvard, who died at the age of eighty, in 2015, believed his diagrammatic paintings were transmitting advice from an extraterrestrial, including how to shift the known universe "into the fifth-dimensional realm." *Through May 27.*

### Frick Collection

#### "Zurbarán's Jacob and His Twelve Sons: Paintings from Auckland Castle"

Francisco de Zurbarán was the second-best painter in seventeenth-century Spain—no disgrace when the champion, his Seville-born near-exact contemporary, happened to be Diego Velázquez, who arguably remains better than anybody, ever. In this room-filling show, thirteen life-size imagined portraits, painted by Zurbarán circa 1640-45, constitute a terrific feat of Baroque storytelling: the movies of their day. Each character has a distinct personality, uniquely posed, costumed, and accessorized, and towering against a bright, clouded sky. All appear in the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis, in which the dying Jacob prophesies the fates of the founders-to-be of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. After nearly four centuries, the canvases sorely need cleaning. The brilliance of their colors has dimmed, notably in passages of brocade and other sumptuous fabrics—a forte of Zurbarán, whose father was a haberdasher. But most of the pictures re-



Three decades into his career, Steve DiBenedetto's paintings (including "Metaphysical Salami," above) look stronger and stranger than ever, at the Derek Eller gallery through April 22.