

SEANKELLY

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The New York Times **Galleries as the Art World's Leading Indicators**



Left, Ilya & Emilia Kabakov/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; above right, The Richard Avedon Foundation; below right, Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov will unveil eight canvases at Pace's Midtown gallery. Their "Vertical Painting No. 5" is above left. The Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills will focus on Richard Avedon's work, including his 1966 photo of Mia Farrow, top right. Isaac Julien's "Untitled (Playtime), 2013," above right, will be shown at Metro Pictures.

TASTE in art is in constant flux. One season's penchant for abstract paintings may be another's fascination with chocolate Santas, or lead balloons, comic strips, or a less-is-more aesthetic. Steering through this weather are commercial galleries, in the thick of things, taking the art world's pulse. Unlike museums, where exhibitions are planned years in advance, galleries can be more nimble, finalizing shows a couple of months ahead of time. Indeed, there is probably no better barometer of current collective rumblings than what's being shown at the top New York and Los Angeles galleries.

This fall and winter, galleries continue to display art in a range of media, addressing an almost dizzying array of cultural and social issues. But in contrast to recent years, there is a growing weariness with costly, feel-good spectacle. Adolescent humor is being trumped by art that's witty, poetic and politically open-ended. Which may be why the coming exhibition at the Pace Gallery by the Russian-born husband and wife team **Ilya** and **Emilia Kabakov** looks so implausibly fresh and of-the-moment.

The Kabakovs have been around for decades, and are best known in the United States for their ironic installations about what Ms. Kabakov, called during a recent phone interview, "the human condition in Soviet Russia." But as their exhibition opening on Nov. 2 will undoubtedly demonstrate, this is not the full story. Mr. Kabakov, 80, has been painting since 1964, and according to his wife, who tends to speak for both of them, "He has never stopped."

At Pace's Midtown gallery, on 32 East 57th Street, Mr. Kabakov will unveil more than eight large canvases completed between 2010 and this year, depicting fragments of images drawn from postcards,

photographs, magazines and Mr. Kabakov's own past artworks. Giving the illusion of collage are the rough edges of torn paper. Figures appear in social or institutional settings, laughing and chatting. Mr. Kabakov exploits the intrinsic silence of painting to evoke feelings of alienation and dread. "They're about memories coming out of the dark," Ms. Kabakov, 68, said.

Apart from his paintings, an installation by both artists, "I Catch the Little White Man," (2003), features a wooden cabinet filled with strings of white figures, and refers to a mental institution in Sweden that doubles as a center for creative research. "It's a little bit ironic," said Ms. Kabakov, "but in general it's about creativity and how to accept people who are different from us." As a complement to the show at Pace, which remains on view through Dec. 21, a new documentary, "Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here," will begin a two-week run at the Film Forum in Manhattan on Nov. 13.

The Kabakovs are not the only artists this autumn enjoying a New York City moment. The British filmmaker and installation artist **Isaac Julien's** ambitious new project, "Playtime," opens at Metro Pictures on Nov. 5, less than three weeks before the arrival of a second major installation, "Ten Thousand Waves," in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art.

At the Metro Pictures show Mr. Julien will introduce a multichannel feature film tracing the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis among a cast of characters that includes a Philippine maid working in Dubai, an artist who has lost his home to bank foreclosure in Iceland, a gallery owner and collector in London, a journalist, several hedge fund managers and an auctioneer.

With James Franco playing the gallery owner and collector, the real-life auctioneer Simon de Pury more or less playing himself and Maggie Cheung in the role of journalist, "Playtime" promises a healthy dose of humor. But in articulating the disparities between his characters' lives, Mr. Julien also offers a much-needed critique of the winners and losers in the global economy. "Playtime" runs through Dec. 17 at Metro Pictures, 519 West 24th Street. "Ten Thousand Waves" will be shown at MoMA from Nov. 25 to Feb. 17.

Josephine Meckseper's public art piece "Manhattan Oil Project," installed more than a year ago on a vacant lot near Times Square, set two bobbing oil pump jacks amid the neighborhood's bright lights and electronic billboards. The piece was a not-so-subtle indictment of American dependence on foreign oil. For her first solo show at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, Ms. Meckseper proposes something a little more muted, turning her intelligent, critical eye on art and design motifs pioneered during the Weimar Republic, and the political underpinnings therein.

Included in the show are five steel and glass cases echoing Mies van der Rohe's early- to midcentury structures for displaying art. Sculptures inside these vitrines playfully refer to Constantin Brancusi, and small paintings quote the early 20th-century German expressionist Bernhard Hoetger. There are also several Modernist examples of display hardware. On the gallery walls, a series of large collage panels with Weimar-era references will hang among photographs bearing the image of a 60-foot stone monument to soldiers killed in World War I, from Worpsswede in northwest Germany, the rural town where Ms. Meckseper grew up.

Ms. Meckseper, 49, teases out clever visual puns between the war monument and the surrounding art and design objects, offering a historical precedent for commercial displays we have probably seen around New York for decades, without ever asking, "Where did this come from?" Her show will run at Andrea Rosen, 525 West 24th Street, from Nov. 23 to Jan. 18.

A conversation about this season's coming gallery exhibitions would not be complete without the inclusion of a couple of West Coast highlights, first among them, "Avedon: Women," opening at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills on Nov. 1. Tracing **Richard Avedon's** extraordinary depictions of women over the course of six decades, this ambitious exhibition will include more than 100 silver gelatin prints, 300 contact prints selected from the artist's personal archives, and in a separate room, the artist's lesser-known color transparencies displayed on light-boxes.

Mr. Avedon's taxonomies of the human spirit, feats of high contrast and ingenious cropping, range from a civil rights era portrait of a black woman attending a debutante cotillion in New Orleans to an elegant image of the Hollywood starlet Mia Farrow, shot over her bare shoulder and highlighting her bony back. Whether his subjects are wincing, laughing, brooding or vamping, Mr. Avedon, who died in 2004, possessed a miraculous gift for pushing individual attributes into high relief, thus capturing each subject's utter uniqueness.

Mr. Avedon's first solo show in the Los Angeles area since 1976, "Women" has been organized in collaboration with the Richard Avedon Foundation, and will remain on view through Dec. 21.

The Los Angeles-based sculptor **Liz Lerner** has long been able to find poetry in what might be considered nontraditional art materials — petri dishes filled with decaying fish eggs, blooming into riotous forms in a spectrum of colors; false eyelashes; surgical gauze; and on occasion, even shrimp tacos. As her experimentations — and the decades — have accumulated, she has proved that it is her soulful embrace of whatever material she is using that has consistently produced such an impressive depth of connotations and feelings.

For her next solo show at Regen Projects in Los Angeles, Ms. Lerner will present ceramic and epoxy wall pieces, a mixed media work made of steamed, bent and painted paper on an aluminum armature, and a free-standing sculpture in mirror-polished aluminum, further establishing her reputation as a master of hybrid forms.

Some of the ceramic pieces call to mind the geological phenomenon of subduction, or what happens when the collision between two solid masses drives one of the masses downward. Others look like broken accordion books. "I'm trying to bring up a sensibility, through color and form, that's very palpable, but which probably means different things to different people," she said in an interview. "It's not really exact. But it feels exact to me." The show runs from Jan. 11 to Feb. 15.

During the midwinter, back in Manhattan, another much-anticipated show will include a selection of paintings and an installation by **Michel Majerus**. Mr. Majerus was a prolific young Luxembourgian artist, globe-trotting between shows in Europe and the United States, before his life and career were cut short by a 2002 plane crash.

In collaboration with his estate, Matthew Marks will dedicate two of his Chelsea galleries to nearly 20 of Mr. Majerus's large-scale paintings and a multimedia installation. When Mr. Marks first saw the artist's work in Germany in 2000, he said, "It had a curious energy to which I was attracted but did not quite understand." Combining references to a vast range of 20th-century masters, from Willem de Kooning to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mr. Majerus's work offers an exuberant window on to the cacophony of images, symbols and texts that reflect 21st-century consciousness.

When Mr. Marks included two paintings in a group exhibition at his gallery five years ago, he said in an e-mail, "They were the most exciting things in the show." Last year, he said, it finally dawned on him that if he wanted to see a comprehensive New York gallery exhibition of Mr. Majerus's work, he was going to have to organize it himself. The exhibition at the Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 and 526 West 22nd Street, will open on Feb. 8 and run through April 19.

For more than a decade the German artist **Frank Thiel** has focused his vibrant, large-format photographs almost exclusively on the city of Berlin, recording its accelerated rebirth and reinvention after the fall of the wall. For his next show, which opens in February at the Sean Kelly Gallery near Hell's Kitchen, Mr. Thiel reveals a continued interest in colorful, highly textured photographs in a large-scale format, only now the object of his penetrating gaze is glacial ice in Patagonia.

Measuring roughly nine feet in height, some of his compositions include as many as five large panels hung side by side. The works gorgeously portray glaciers calving into water, horizontal cracks in their seemingly solid surfaces, and an almost surreal range of blues, greens and chalky blacks.

"I'm not inventing color that is not there," said Mr. Thiel in an e-mail, adding that the ice in Patagonia first impressed him during a visit there some 15 years ago. A testament to the simultaneous heft and vulnerability of the natural world, Mr. Thiel's extraordinary photographs of these towering ice cliffs were shot during a recent three-week trip, and will be on view at Sean Kelly Gallery, 475 10th Avenue, until March.