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Art Basel

## Chicago: six must-see exhibitions

Painter Peter Uka's American debut, a suite of coy new works by Rachel Harrison, and a group show focused on the social power of abstraction are among this season's highlights

**Claire Voon**  
**December 1, 2021**

From blue-chip spaces to artist-run apartment projects, galleries in Chicago are back in full swing. Current and upcoming exhibition highlights in this midwestern arts hub will take visitors to West Town, which in recent years has gradually cemented its status as the city's unofficial gallery district. Much of this route can be walked, but it's November in Chicago – bundle up.



Installation view of Peter Uka's exhibition 'Longing', 2021. Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim, Chicago.

**Peter Uka, 'Longing'**  
**Mariane Ibrahim**  
**Through January 15, 2022**

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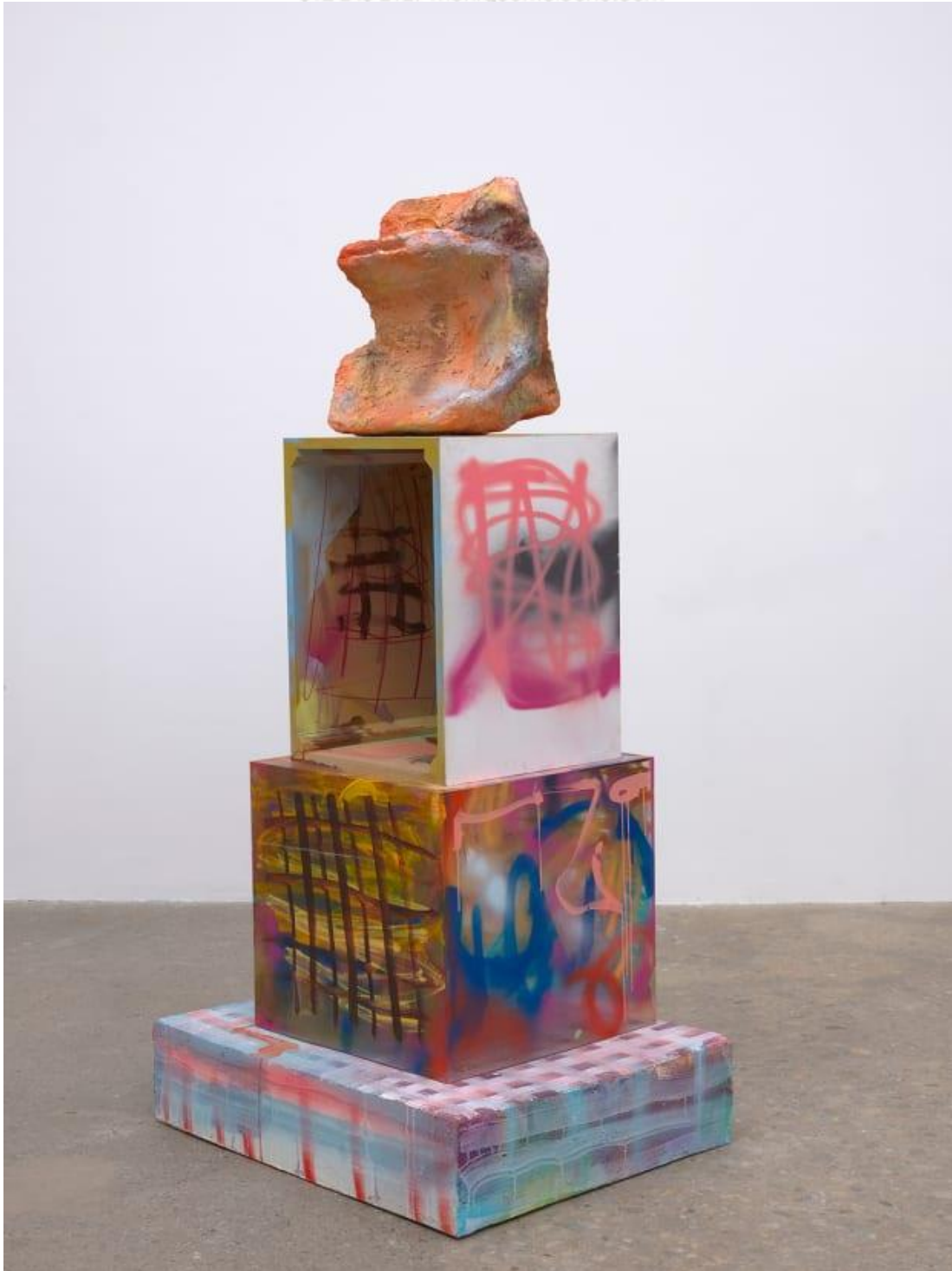
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Since opening in Chicago two years ago, **Mariane Ibrahim** has consistently mounted show after show of artists to watch. This presentation of paintings by Peter Uka marks the Nigeria-born, Cologne-based artist's U.S. debut – and his first show with Ibrahim, who since her early days as a gallerist in Seattle has been known for championing artists of the African diaspora. On view are large-scale oil paintings that honor Uka's memories of his home country, delivering intimate views of people in domestic and shared places. Each scene is lovingly tinged with a nostalgia for the 1970s, most apparent in Uka's sartorial depictions and embrace of bold, dynamic patterns. 'Longing' offers the opportunity to steep, leisurely, in the artist's laid-back, winsome reveries, examples of which will also be brought to the gallery's booth at Art Basel in Miami Beach.

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Rachel Harrison, *Assorted Varieties*, 202. Wood, plexiglass, cardboard, cement, acrylic, enamel, wax crayon, iPod Nano, and pigment inkjet prints. Courtesy of the artist, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York City. Photo by Tim Nighswander / IMAGING4ART.

**Rachel Harrison, 'Assorted Varieties'**

**Corbett vs. Dempsey**

**November 19, 2021 – January 8, 2022**

Among the found objects lurking in this solo presentation of work by Rachel Harrison is a MyPillow pillow. The cushion – standard-sized – is lodged in one of four large mixed-media sculptures at Corbett vs. Dempsey, the blue of its protective wrapping reflecting that of the wonky monolith, coyly titled *Standard Blue* (2021). Such winks are quintessential Harrison, and this tightly curated exhibition brings her distinct brand of humor to a Chicago gallery for the first time. The four featured sculptural works, built with her favored materials of cement, polystyrene, and contemporary detritus, evoke architectural elements, shipping crates, and spray-painted plinths left from toppled monuments. Three of these could be described as monochrome: Each one's off-kilter anatomy revels in the potential of a single primary color; red, yellow, and blue are echoed in similar hues popping from three wall-mounted works. In *A Firestorm* (2014), a trio of used Post-It Notes are neatly framed, each bearing an enigmatic message to no one in particular. As she is wont to do, Harrison leaves only a trail of breadcrumbs.



Installation view of 'Abstraction & Social Critique', 2021, Kavi Gupta, Chicago. From left to right: Works by James Little, Jack Whitten, and Miya Ando. Sculptures by Miya Ando. Photo by John Lusic

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**'Abstractions & Social Critique'**

**Kavi Gupta**

**Through December 18, 2021**

The premise of this group exhibition is, on the surface, quite simple: Sprawled across **Kavi Gupta's** Washington Boulevard location, it explores how 14 artists have heeded the enduring call of abstraction. Notably, the show's focus is also on intergenerational dialogue, illuminating connections between artists working across media ranging from ink paintings to NFTs. The oldest represented is Oakland-based artist Raymond Saunders, who, with his work *Untitled* (n.d.), layers newspapers with an elegant chalk drawing and boisterous eruptions of paint. The collage is both diaristic, reflecting Saunders' material environment, and suggestive of sociopolitical realities in its choice of headlines; like a jazz composition, its narrative remains stubbornly open-ended. Among the youngest artists is Cameron Welch, whose painted mosaic of marble, glass, ceramic, quartz, and stones explores the power of myths to record and reimagines Black identity. One immediate through line of this show is the total freedom found in the ambiguity of abstraction; another is the genre's boundless potential to exude more than visual intrigue by carrying personal, social, and political narratives – and respond to, or subvert, the then and now.



Installation view of David Antonio Cruz's exhibition 'icutfromthemiddletogetabetterslice', Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.



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**David Antonio Cruz, 'icutfromthemiddletogetabetterslice'**

**Monique Meloche Gallery**

**Through December 18, 2021**

In this tender and uplifting solo exhibition at **Monique Meloche Gallery**, David Antonio Cruz celebrates a freedom particularly significant for queer and trans people of color: that to create chosen families, clans that provide mutual care, understanding, and support. The brightly colored, realist paintings on view continue Cruz's embrace of large-scale figuration to advocate for queer visibility, and they feature intergenerational and interracial sitters at ease, lounging in poses that evoke the sensuality yet carefreeness of Balthus' girls. The centerpiece of this show – Cruz's second with the gallery, who will also present his work at Art Basel in Miami Beach – is a monumental diptych that is among the artist's most crowded portraits to date: Nine models from his personal circles pile on and around a plush settee, leaning against each other with piercing gazes that fight for the viewer's attention. The strength of these bonds is further alluded to in dramatic wax pencil renderings of deep-rooted Ceiba trees.



Installation view of Sara Greenberger Rafferty's exhibition 'Views from Somewhere', 2021, DOCUMENT, Chicago. Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago.

**Sara Greenberger Rafferty, 'Views from Somewhere'**

**Document**

**Through December 18, 2021**

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Since 2017, Sara Greenberger Rafferty has been exploring kilnforming and the seductive effects of heat on glass. For the artist, glass – being a material that is inextricable from the medium of photography – is an apt tool to explore notions of perception and ways of seeing in our digital, tech-centric era. In ‘Views from Somewhere’, her third show at **Document**, Rafferty is showing recent experiments in glass- and image-making. Like past bodies of work, these too lean heavily on stock images, which she obscures with an alchemist’s interventions. For instance, a photograph of a hand holding a camera lens is seemingly embalmed in colored glass; multiple versions of this image-object, resting on little ledges that evoke smartphone holders, line the gallery walls. In Rafferty’s beguiling constructions, glass is a panel, a frame, a screen, a black mirror.

Claire Voon is a journalist and critic who has contributed to publications including *The New York Times*, *ARTnews*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. She is also deputy editor of *Borderless Magazine*, a nonprofit that covers the U.S. immigration system and immigrant communities.