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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Will Heinrich
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'Black Pulp!'

International Print Center New York
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 3

Corrosive racial stereotypes have always been rife in American culture, but a counterculture of corrective images has existed too. That's the subject of this rich historical show of work in various print media. The curators, William Villalongo and Mark Thomas Gibson, both artists, take the story back to the early 20th century with two book jacket designs by Aaron Douglas. One is an abstract, upsurging, rocket-like pattern for Alain LeRoy Locke's "The New Negro" (1925); the other, a sinuous Deco-Nubian tableau for "Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists" (1926). Both in content and design, they sum up the show's view of the "black experience" as uncategorizably diverse.

The historical images that follow support this take. They include an effervescent 1930s Esquire spread by E. Simms Campbell illustrating African-American dance styles; Black Panther Party broadsides from the late 1960s; 1990s comic books featuring the black superhero Static. This material, much of it on loan from the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University, is supplemented by LP album covers (Sun Ra, Kurtis Blow) and Chester Himes paperbacks, along with work by some two dozen contemporary artists working within, or with reference to, a pop-culture groove. Kerry James Marshall is here in his formally brilliant "Rythm Mastr" cartoon series, as are several younger artists — Firelei Báez, William Downs, Lucia Hierro, Kenny Rivero, Alexandria Smith — now coming into their own.

The show, which originated at the Yale School of Art, has a keeper of a free gallery guide, and a catalog with solid essays by the curators as well as by Tomashi Jackson, an artist with a solo at Tilton Gallery on the Upper East Side through Dec. 23, and Robert Storr. Their words are an integral part of a superlative visual package.



The Black Panther Party newspaper, March 9, 1969, in "Black Pulp!" at the International Print Center New York.

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