

ART & DESIGN

'Another Look at Detroit: Parts 1 and 2'

JULY 24, 2014

Art in Review

By **HOLLAND COTTER**

Last year Christie's surveyed and appraised the holdings of the Detroit Institute of the Arts with an eye to possible sales. More recently, the Detroit-born curator Todd Levin has been taking stock of art produced there for what turns out to be a strong two-part group show at Marianne Boesky Gallery and Marlborough Chelsea.

Mr. Levin takes the story back to the early 19th century, when an enterprising New Yorker named John Mix Stanley (1814-72) moved to Detroit, still a frontier town, set up as a painter specializing in Native American subjects and helped start a beta-version of the institute. The show then takes a big leap forward into this port city's economic golden age with a 1907 formal portrait of the museum's first board of trustees by Percy Ives (1864-1928), a trustee himself, who was born and raised in Detroit and had a studio on Cass Avenue.

The address was significant. A century later, in the 1960s, a slum area called the Cass Corridor became the city's primary residential art neighborhood, bordering the campus of Wayne State University. The show's concentration of Cass artists is one of its great strengths. Jim Chatelain, Brenda Goodman, Michael C. Luchs, Gordon Newton and Robert Sestok are some of the associated names. But just as you're ready to slot them stylistically — Expressionist painting, industrial assemblage — along comes a group member like John Egner, with cool linear abstraction, or Ann Mikolowski, with a crisp, super-realist drawing of a handgun.

As if to shake up further the city's present reputation for roughness and

grit, Mr. Levin includes a sampling of the modernist design that emerged from Cranbrook Academy of Art in the Detroit suburb Bloomfield Hills: a silver teapot by Arthur Nevill Kirk; a tubular chair by Eero Saarinen; a calligraphic weaving by Saarinen's mother, Loja. And in his choice of work by African-American artists like Al Loving, Allie McGhee and Gilda Snowden, he steers toward abstraction and away from overt politics. The Detroit-born James Lee Byars (1932-1997), who has a retrospective at MoMA PS1 through Sept. 7, shares something of the reductive Cranbrook sensibility (though he studied at Wayne State), while Mike Kelley (1954-2012), also a native son, went in an opposite, anarchic direction. The show's young or youngish artists — Liz Cohen, Scott Hocking, Kate Levant — explore turf in between.

Mr. Levin throws in some nice surprises. As if to establish the show's Motor City bona fides, he adds, along with vintage car advertisements, Diego Rivera's portrait of Edsel Ford and a depiction by Ray Johnson, that Detroiter from outer space, of Henry Ford II on a belt buckle. What really fuels the proceedings, though, is the evidence it gives of the creative energy that this American beauty of a city generates. Always has, always will.

Correction: July 26, 2014

An art review on Friday about "Another Look at Detroit: Parts 1 and 2," at the Marianne Boesky Gallery and Marlborough Chelsea in Manhattan misstated the given name of an artist whose work is included in the show. She is Gilda Snowden, not Gloria.

Marianne Boesky Gallery

509 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 8

Marlborough Chelsea

545 West 25th Street

Through Aug. 8

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