

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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Jillian Steinhauer November 28, 2018

Lorraine O'Grady

Through Dec. 15. Alexander Gray Associates, 510 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-399-2636, alexandergray.com.



Lorraine O'Grady's collage poems in her new show, "Cutting Out CONYT." Credit Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, via Alexander Gray Associates

In June 1977, Lorraine O'Grady began cutting up The New York Times Magazine. Every week for six months, she removed words from the newspaper and arranged them into a multipanel collage poem. The resulting series, "Cutting Out The New York Times (CONYT)," was formative: She has said that she began it "as a writer but ended it as more of a visual artist."

Still, Ms. O'Grady — who, before becoming an artist, attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop and then worked as an intelligence analyst and a rock music critic — was never entirely satisfied with the work, and 40 years later she revisited it. For a new series, "Cutting Out CONYT" — selections of which are on view at Alexander Gray Associates — she repeated

the process of creating poetry from found text; this time, however, she mined both the public language of The Times and her own previous, private reckoning with it. One poem feels almost uncannily self-referential: “The modern artist,/finding himself with/no shared/foundation, has/begun to build on/Reckless Storytelling/STAR WORDS”/“and/The Deluxe Almost-Everything-Included/WORK OF ART.”

Notably, these works are not visually deluxe; they’re spare diptychs that recall open books. White space can be a luxury, yet Ms. O’Grady makes full use of it even as the words within hold their ground. She skillfully wields the matter-of-fact language of newspapers, freeing it from specificity and opening it up to new interpretations that we must forge ourselves. Her clever and evocative assemblages of phrases seem only to dance toward and away from meaning. They are, to borrow one of her lines, “The Best of All Gifts: Common Things That Move the Imagination/A FEELING AS WELL AS A LOOK.”

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