

## Diana Thater in New York

By Robert Ayers

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PHOTO GALLERY  
Diana Thater in New York

NEW YORK—For her latest show at [David Zwirner](#), "Here is a text about the world..." L.A.-based video artist **Diana Thater** presents two series of works—video pieces for individual monitors showing historical and imagined games of chess (including one that re-creates the narrative of *Through the Looking Glass*), and two room-size installations (and one photograph) featuring falconry—both of which, like much of her art, bring observation to the fore. The falconry pieces, for example, hone in not only on how the birds and their human handlers observe and interact with one another, but also, by including images of the equipment and crew, on the relationship between the film's subjects and its creators, who, of course, are themselves engaged in careful observation.

The complexity of Thater's art is also hinted at by the links she draws between chess and falconry: Both had their beginnings in the Middle East, blossomed in medieval Europe, and carry associations to royalty and combat. Still, the series are contrasted in the show, with the chess videos approaching a kind of intellectual abstraction, and the falconry installations delightfully ironic in that the birds are never depicted in flight.

For her weekend picks in and around New York, Thater recommends:

1. **George Trakas: Beacon Point** at [Dia Beacon](#), ongoing

"Beacon Point is a permanent installation by the artist George Trakas, who specializes in sculpture that integrates itself into its architectural and natural environment. This work is comprised of a terraced deck, a new boardwalk, and a restored bulkhead. Trakas fits the work elegantly and almost seamlessly into its place on the [Hudson River] shoreline. As a work of sculpture, the materials and design are impeccable, and as a place, the dock is a pleasure. When I was there on a fall afternoon, a few people had set up chairs and were quietly sunning themselves, while others fished off the dock. It's the ideal public sculpture because it *works*."

2. **Ann Carlson & Mary Ellen Strom** at [Alexander Gray](#), through February 2

"*Sloss, Kerr, Rosenberg & Moore* (2007), made by the collaborative team of Carlson and Strom, is a great piece. This video was made with four practicing New York attorneys who perform modern dance—like movements based on their own gestures and speak phrases they use in their professional lives. The work turns the practice of law, and the

judicial system in which it operates, into theater, with the attorneys as its handsome, suited leading men. The artists' work is well made, and the performers are not amateurs or "regular" people doing what choreographers think "regular" gestures may be. After all, the lawyers' gestures and speech are well rehearsed in life. It's a pleasure to see them perform the ritualistic dance they do everyday."

3. **Jason Rhoades: Black Pussy** at [David Zwirner](#), through January 26

"Black Pussy offends many people in the art world, and that surprises me. Collectors and institutions have graciously accepted offense as artists have ironically proffered it. However, the embrace of Rhoades's large-scale installation is an uncomfortable one, perhaps because, unlike most "bad boy" artists, who generally celebrate their pre-adolescence, Rhoades puts misogyny and racism front and center rather than subconsciously burying it and then denying it's there. This three-dimensional tapestry is made up of a riot of cultural signifiers that actually signify not ideas, but beliefs held by American culture about itself. 'Cowboy versus Indian' is one of the many texts within the work. I am glad to see Rhoades's work making everyone a bit unnerved about their own safe spot in the faux-politically-correct art world, while his imitators (who are legion)

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go smilingly about their tame tasks.”

4. **Lawrence Weiner: As Far as the Eye Can See** at the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), through February 10

“As soon as the elevator doors opened and I saw this show, I smiled. Crowded up, word upon word, Weiner’s work constantly talks about the livable present. The work assumes that art acts are everyday acts and that we all participate. Bumped up, one above the other and spilling over into one another, the work talks and talks, and the installation made me see Weiner in a way I never had before. I realized that his pieces work best when they seem less like orders to do something poetic (as they sometimes do when stamped on the side of a building or some other big lone wall) but speak together as a cacophony of voices in which being and doing are the same.

5. **Francis Alÿs: Fabiola** at Dia Art Foundation at the [Hispanic Society of America](#), through April 6

“Dia’s Lynne Cooke has the subtlest hand as a curator when curating an artist who acts as a curator. Here she has placed Francis Alÿs’s Fabiola collection in a little corner of New York’s Hispanic Society. This is a magnificent venue for this seemingly small and humble show of mostly anonymous paintings. Alÿs initially found, and then sought out, paintings of Saint Fabiola, [a Roman-era female ascetic] whose image was fixed in the minds and hands of novice painters by an 1885 work by French academic painter Jean-Jacques Henner. The context for this show is everything. In the Hispanic Society, you can see **Velázquez**, **Zurbarán**, and **Murillo**; you can also see pottery, textiles and other useful objects made by anonymous hands. The Fabiolas find their place as another type of collection, a repeated object used by those who made or bought them as household icons. I think the Hispanic Society should incorporate this collection into their own.”

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