



TOP 10 NEW YORK GALLERY EXHIBITIONS CAUGHT IN THE COVID-19 SHUTDOWN

By David Ebony | May 20, 2020

Highlights of New York Contemporary Art Galleries at the Shutdown

As Covid-19 spread, with social distancing restrictions in place and most workplaces shuttered in response, New York City's art galleries and museums entered lock-down mode in mid-March. As of mid-May, there were still no reopening plans in sight. The art world has practically ground to a halt, retreating to the illusionary effects of cyberspace, social media, or furtive drive-by exhibitions to simulate a creative environment that is, sadly, a mere ghost of its former self. The situation's toll on artists, the art community, and cultural economy has yet to be determined comprehensively, but like the rest of the country's condition in the wake of the pandemic and financial fallout, it is likely to be dire if not devastating.

At least for the moment, firsthand experience of artworks and art exhibitions have become precious memories that need to be preserved. Below are brief comments about some of the most memorable exhibitions I experienced in person just before the gallery shutdowns. These are gallery shows that on some level moved me intellectually, personally, and emotionally. Several of them constitute remarkable achievements by artists relatively new to the New York art scene, while others are key exhibitions by midcareer artists, or milestone presentations by art-world veterans, including a number of the most influential artists of our time. Some of the galleries mentioned here promise to keep these exhibitions on hold, and to reopen them to the public as soon as social distancing and other restrictions of movement due to the pandemic are relaxed.



Installation view: *Nicholas Galanin: Carry a Song / Disrupt an Anthem*, with, in foreground, *The American Dream is Alie and Well*, 2012, at Peter Blum Gallery, New York, NY.

Nicholas Galanin at Peter Blum Gallery

The works on view in *Carry a Song / Disrupt and Anthem*, the arresting New York solo debut of Alaska-born artist Nicholas Galanin, address issues of Indigenous people—political aggression against, as well as cultural suppression of Native Americans, specifically. A Tlingit-Unangax artist, with a studio in Sitka, Alaska, Galanin has gained a considerable amount of attention lately for his politically motivated, yet formally elegant works. His large-scale woven cotton and wool tapestry, *White Noise, American Prayer Rug* (2018), alluding to the racist and xenophobic cacophony that has permeated American airwaves in recent years, was a highlight of last year's Whitney Biennial and is also featured in the Peter Blum exhibition.



Nicholas Galanin, *I Think It Goes Like This (Gold)*, 2019, at Peter Blum Gallery, New York, NY.

In command of an impressive array of mediums—from painting, sculpture and photography, to installation, video and performance—Galanin achieves a consistent balance of visual beauty and palpable rage against social injustice in practically every work here. Emblematic of the U.S. government's often hunter-like aggression toward Indigenous people, their land and wildlife, *The American Dream is Alie and Well* (2012), for example, shows what appears to be a bear rug, but with the American flag insignia instead of fur, and rifle bullets in place of claws. Somewhat more subdued, but no less visually arresting, and harboring a similarly scathing critique, *I Think It Goes Like This (Gold)*, 2019, features a chopped up totem pole, like those of the Pacific Northwest, arranged on the floor, with each section covered in gold leaf. In poetic fashion, it suggests the violent destruction of tribes, their once-glorious Indigenous culture, and the frustrated attempts to reassemble the splintered remains.