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On View

Art That Makes You Smile: 5 Exhibitions to See This Summer That Embrace the Joys of Play

Some of the most memorable art is that which brings a smile to the faces of onlookers, and, this season, there's plenty to see.

Maria Vogel, June 14, 2019



Jen Stark, 30 cubed (2019). Image courtesy of the artist and Joshua Liner Gallery.

When summertime rolls around, it brings with it a desire to enjoy carefree leisure. And though museum-going and gallery-hopping may not sound like the *most* relaxing ways to spend your downtime—while observing art, you're often confronted with works about heavy topics or important issues—art can have a playful, easygoing side to it, too.

Some of the most memorable art is that which brings a smile to the faces of onlookers, and, this summer, there is no shortage of shows that embrace the power of playfulness. Below, we've rounded up five exhibitions by artists who treat play as an integral part of their practice.

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Sally Saul, Installation view. Image by Dan Bradica and courtesy Pioneer Works.

Sally Saul's "Blue Hills, Yellow Tree" at Pioneer Works

Pioneer Works is celebrating three decades of sculptor Sally Saul's joyful ceramics practice in their current exhibition, "Blue Hills, Yellow Tree." In Saul's first retrospective, we are greeted with her signature ceramics that marry the centuries-old practice with contemporary, playful figures and forms. In this particular exhibition, Saul's works pay homage to the places she's called home throughout the United States. Just as these environments have innately left impactful marks on the artist's practice, Saul outwardly acknowledges their influence in her sculptural depictions.

Animals, figures, flora, and fauna are adorned with humorous twists: an overalls-wearing otter, dogs with grimacing faces, and stout human-like figures with fanatical expressions stand to attention. Though cartoon-like, Saul's pieces produce an emotional response for their sweet natures, together forming optimistic world in which all aspects of the natural world seem to coexist in perfect harmony.

"Blue Hills, Yellow Tree" at Pioneer Works, NYC is on view through July 7th.



Jen Stark, *Squared* (2019). Image courtesy of the artist and Joshua Liner Gallery.

Jen Stark, “Dimensionality” at Joshua Liner Gallery

Jen Stark’s work is a playful examination of color, shape, and optical illusion. In her inaugural solo exhibition with Joshua Liner Gallery, Stark amalgamates the fields of math, science, and physics to bring to life sculpture, painting, and installation works that feel otherworldly and full of intrigue and wonder. Stark takes big-picture concepts, such as fractals, infinity, and sacred geometry, among others, and presents them in a contained, approachable, and fun manner; viewing one of Stark’s works feels akin to staring into the lens of a kaleidoscope. Aptly titled, “Dimensionality,” her forthcoming exhibition seeks to temporarily extract gallery-goers from reality, and provides a refuge of optical illusion where one can enjoy Stark’s visually stimulating configurations.

“Dimensionality” at Joshua Liner Gallery, NYC opens on June 20th is on view through July 19th.



Katherine Bradford, *Wedding Ceremony* (2019). Courtesy of the artist and Campoli Presti, London / Paris.

Katherine Bradford, “Legs and Stripes” at Campoli Presti

Katherine Bradford’s fun, colorful explorations into figurative abstraction have traveled across the pond to the U.K. in her first solo show with Campoli Presti. Gleefully titled *Legs and Stripes*, Bradford adorns her canvases with various human and non-human characters while creating a reoccurring focal point of legs alongside different arrangements of stripes. As explored in past bodies of work, Bradford employs these motifs as a way to further investigate color fields in painting. The scenes are both lively and absurd: heads (some with faces and some without) appear out of a dark abyss; a cat with pointy ears and whiskers stands amongst humans; and arms detached from their bodies frantically reach out into the picture planes. Each individual work seems to tell a (mysterious and playful) story all its own.

Apart from the subject matter, the colors in Bradford’s paintings are enough to brighten any mood. Bradford employs a palette of lively hues that seem to span the entirety of the rainbow, livening up the white walls of the gallery and generating a sense of visual euphoria.

“Legs and Stripes” at Campoli Presti, London is on view through July 27th.



Nevine Mahmoud, Installation View. Photo by Theo Christelis, courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Nevine Mahmoud, “Belly Room” at Soft Opening

In her first European solo exhibition, Los Angeles-based artist Nevine Mahmoud sculpts bodily forms with pristine flair. “Belly Room” at Soft Opening, London includes works which Mahmoud constructs in the traditionally male-dominated materials of glass and marble. Fighting against the rigidity of these mediums, Mahmoud creates what appear to be delicate and soft representations that possess an innate femininity. Sometimes fleshy in appearance, the works are both sensuous and playful. Between their curvy shapes, pink-to-nude hues and lighthearted appeal, one forgets the durable materials that formed them.

“Belly Room” at Soft Opening, London is on view through June 30th.



Holly Coulis, *Pineapple and Coffees* (2019). Photo courtesy Jeff McLane and image courtesy of the artist and Philip Martin Gallery.

Holly Coulis, “Stilly” at Philip Martin Gallery

In her cleverly titled exhibition currently on view at Philip Martin Gallery, Holly Coulis takes the thematic of still life painting and explores its possibilities. The works that make up “Stilly” are contemporary takes on the still life with as much appeal and attraction as the omnipresent selfie. Coulis paints objects in their simplest forms, as recognizable to a child just beginning to learn about his or her world as they are to an overstimulated adult looking for a moment of reprieve. Age-old still life motifs such as fruit and wine glasses are met with their more modern, millennial counterparts, like sunscreen, cigarettes, and avocados. Though

Philip Martin Gallery

straightforward in their representation, the elements in Coulis's work are painted with subtle stylistic elements that have playful effects on the viewer's eyes. And flat as the works may be, the objects manage to pulsate off of the canvas, shifting perception and captivating the viewer's gaze.

"Stilly" at Philip Martin Gallery, Los Angeles is on view through July 6th.