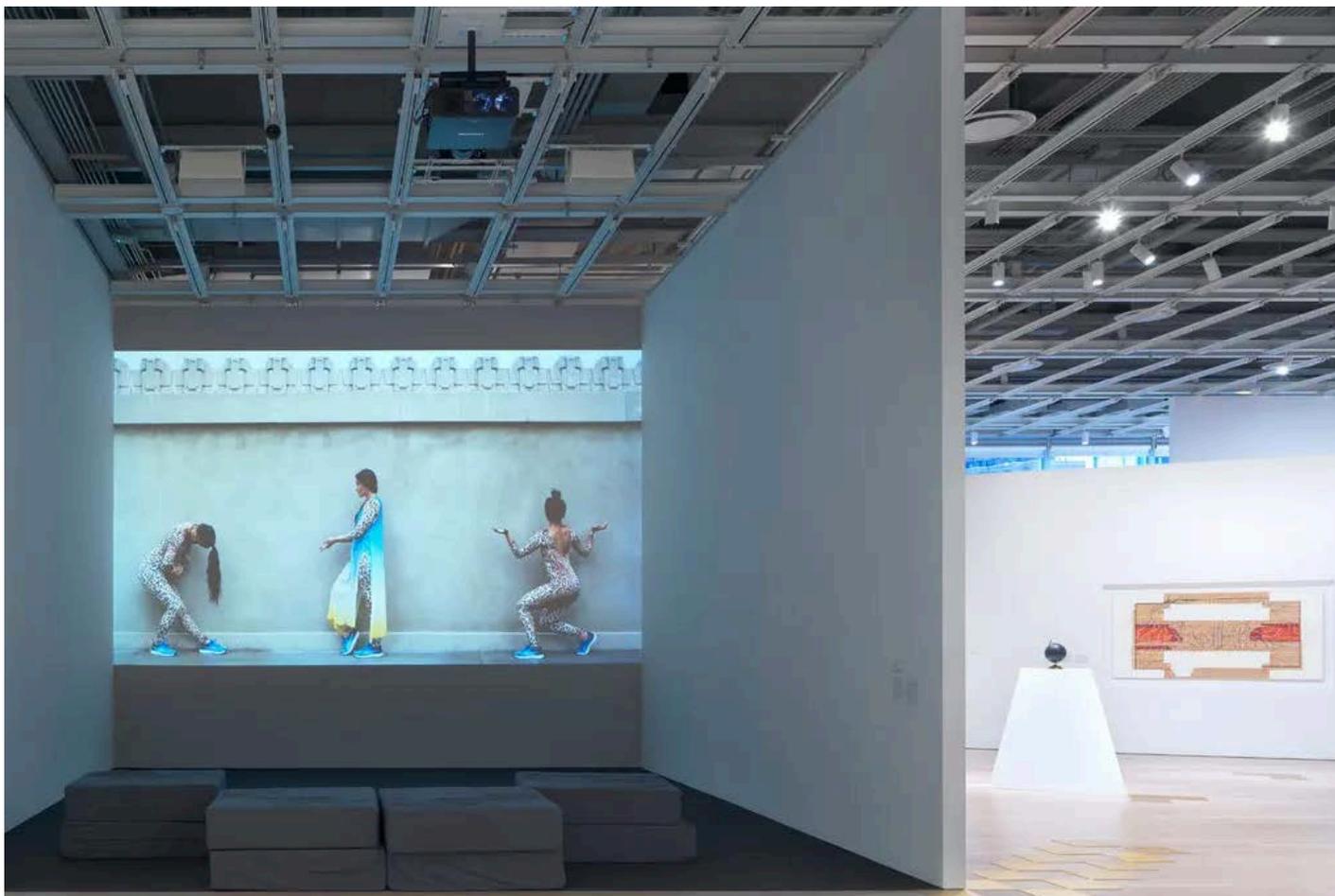


What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Martha Schwendener, Will Heinrich and Jillian Steinhåuer Sept. 13, 2018

'Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay'

Through Sept. 30. Whitney Museum of American Art, 99 Gansevoort Street, Manhattan; 212-570-3600, whitney.org.



"Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay" highlights contemporary art that is steeped in indigenous American ideas. Ron Amstutz

Modernism, as the story goes, was a radical, era-defining break with the past. It gave us new ways of seeing and shaping the world. But what if we're also giving it too much credit? What if we've been elevating it at the expense of other cultural production that deserves equal attention?

These are some of the crucial questions raised by "Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art," an exhibition at the Whitney Museum featuring seven Latinx artists, the gender-neutral term for those of Latin descent. The show highlights contemporary art that's steeped in indigenous American ideas; the three titular words are in Quechua, the most widely spoken indigenous language in the Americas. Significantly, each of those words has multiple meanings, suggesting a flexibility that mirrors each artist's use of a variety of media (though it's not reflected in the show's layout, which sequesters the artists in their own spaces).

Claudia Peña Salinas and Livia Corona Benjamin point to specific failures of Modernism in Mexico. Their photographs, videos and sculptures are richly narrative and abstract, with the artists testing different approaches to their topics. Clarissa Tossin emphasizes the indigenous roots of the Mayan Revival architectural style. Her video of Crystal Sepúlveda dancing around Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House is a standout.

William Cordova, Jorge González and Ronny Quevedo draw on indigenous constructions of space — including pre-Columbian ball courts, temples and weaving methods — while thoughtfully infusing their installation with contemporary elements, in the process tracing lineages. Guadalupe Maravilla similarly merges past and present by collaborating with undocumented immigrants to draw mazelike lines on manipulated reproductions of a 16th-century colonial manuscript written in Nahuatl, an indigenous language. On the strength of its artwork, this show is a success. Mounted in a Western museum devoted to modern and contemporary American art, its effect is even more powerful.

JILLIAN STEINHAUER