

Leidy Churchman, Nil Yalter, and Works from the Permanent Collection Open at the Hessel Museum of Art

By Lynn Woods

If you're a fan of painting, the highlight of Bard College's Hessel Museum of Art's summer season, which opens with three new exhibitions on June 22, will likely be the sumptuous show of more than 60 works entitled "Leidy Churchman: Crocodile."

This represents the first museum show for Churchman, a queer artist who was born in 1979 and whose gallery shows in New York, LA, and Boston have received rave reviews. Churchman's investigation of the painting process spans figuration and abstraction, encompassing richly colored landscapes to intimate portraits of people and everyday objects.

Color is key to the expressiveness of his work, and his original folksy style is crossed in different instances with Dadaism, Surrealism, Pop, and the flat, simplified representation of the American Modernists—in particular Marsden Hartley (also a resident of Maine, where Churchman paints when he's not in New York).



Photo: Lewis Ronalds

Leidy Churchman, Medieval Sketchbook, 2018. Private Collection. Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London / Piraeus.

Churchman "uses painting as a way to study or focus on different philosophies and disciplines," said Lauren Cornell, chief curator at the Hessel.

"Churchman has an incredibly wide range of references, from Henri Rousseau to Marsden Hartley to peers like Xylor Jane, that he makes apparent in his paintings. He often paints one to one from an original," she adds. "The works form an archive of his own preoccupations and interests."

The show will also include some of the artist's playful videos and his intricately painted book covers.



Photo: Lewis Ronalds

Leidy Churchman, Untitled (Billboard of an Empty Bed), 2018. Collection of Milovan Farronato. Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London / Piraeus.

A second show, “Nil Yalter: Exile Is a Hard Job,” gives recognition to a Cairo-born pioneering video and multi-media artist, now in her eighties, who has never before shown her work in the US.

Raised in Istanbul, Yalter moved to Paris in 1965 to escape political turmoil and has resided in France ever since.

“Yalter was radicalized by the feminist movement and political events that happened in the late ‘60s and early 70s, and she turned from painting towards video and a socially-engaged practice, making multi-part collages on immigrants, incarcerated women, housewives and other people often treated violently or reductively in popular media,” according to Cornell.



Photo: Nil Yalter

Nil Yalter, Le Chevalier d'Éon, 1978 (detail) 7 photographs, 2 paintings: acrylic on paper, 2 Polaroids, video. Detail: video still © Nil Yalter

The issues of displacement, discrimination, and exploitation at the heart of her projects makes her work extremely timely, Cornell added. The show, which originated in Museum Ludwig, in Cologne, focuses on Yalter's works from the 1960s through the 1980s and consists of her early abstract paintings, videos, collages, and installations that combine video, assemblage and photography. Cornell sums up Yalter's style as "between documentary and poetry."

The season is rounded out by "Acting Out: Works from the Marieluise Hessel Collection," an exhibit of works by Larry Clark, Lyle Ashton Harris, Nan Goldin, Boris Mihailov, Lorraine O'Grady, Cindy Sherman, Jo Spence and other artists in the permanent collection that reflect themes explored in a film by Leigh Ledare entitled The Task.



Photo: Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna

Nil Yalter, Circular Tention, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 125 cm. © Nil Yalter

The Task explores the social dynamics and discontent that erupts in a series of encounters between 28 participants and 10 psychologists, which were constructed to examine the individuals' relationship to the group—in terms of their identities, roles, desires and biases—through a particular methodology.

The exhibition also includes a selection from the Ektachrome Archive, Lyle Ashton Harris' journals, diaries, and planners spanning the period from the mid 1980s to the early 2000s. Harris took intimate photographs of his friends and lovers, nightclubs and landscapes during a period marked by the AIDS crisis and the formation of Queer Nation.

The opening is from 2 to 5 pm on June 22, and the exhibitions are on display through October 13 at the Hessel Museum of Art (located at 33 Garden Road, Annandale-On-Hudson). The museum is open Thursdays through Sundays 11am to 5pm.