

Art

## The '70s Are Back, Baby

*That 70's Show*, a new "art fair" in Manhattan, is a refreshingly free alternative to this weekend's astronomically priced shows.



Elaine Velie May 18, 2023

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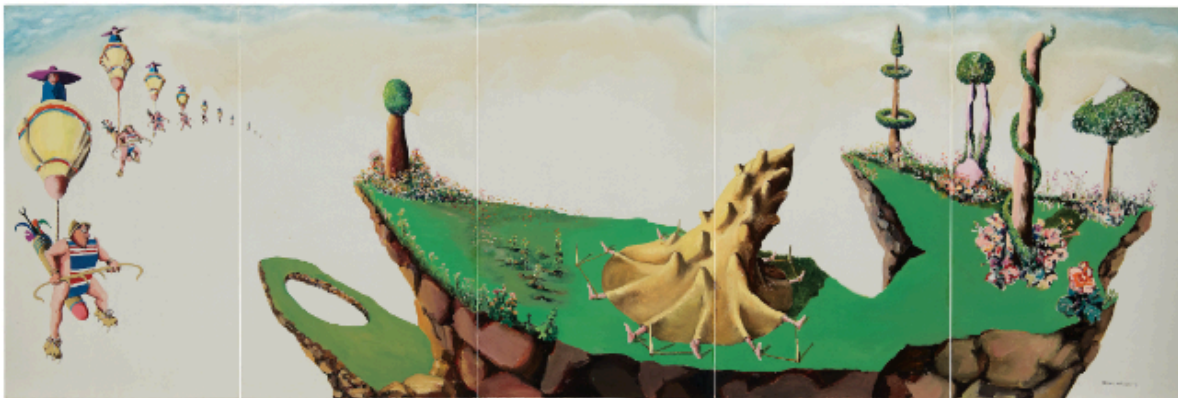


21 galleries contributed work for this weekend's pop-up exhibition. (photo by Jenny Gorman, courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery)

Tucked into the third and fourth floors of an old building on Lower Manhattan's Great Jones Street, an expansive gallery exhibition is paying homage to the 1970s. Running through Sunday, May 21, [\*That '70s Show\*](#) is a refreshingly free alternative to this weekend's astronomically priced art fairs. It includes presentations by 21 galleries, all featuring work from the decade of the shag carpet.

The two upper-level loft spaces are part of Eric Firestone Gallery, which has its primary storefront a few blocks away on the same street. All three spaces are in Soho, the bohemian hub of 1970s New York. Now, the neighborhood is filled with tech-boom-era startups (have you ever heard of Face Gym, a facial massage parlor and skincare store outfitted like a workout space?), other luxury-adjacent storefronts, and global fashion chains. Once off the main drag, visitors walk through a low gate, buzz up to Eric Firestone Gallery, and ascend a creaky wooden staircase before arriving in the first of the two white galleries. The paint job is so bright — and the loft windows so big — that the spaces feel somewhat like a dream.

“The project came together spontaneously and quickly, it was completely organized within the last month,” said Eric Firestone Gallery’s Director Jen Samet. (Samet is a *Hyperallergic* contributor.) Eric Firestone asked a handful of New York City galleries to lend work. After participants submitted their selections, each gallery was assigned a section of the white wall.



Benny Andrews, “Sexism Study” (1973), oil on five stretched canvas panels (image courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery)

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Paintings by Robert Duran line the long wall of the loft. (photo by Jenny Gorman, courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery)

Chelsea's Michael Rosenfeld Gallery contributed part of a series by Benny Andrews titled *Sexism* (1973), comprising a long oil painting and nine ink drawings. The series is the fourth of five bodies of work that Andrews created in response to the upcoming American Revolution Bicentennial. A federally appointed commission was tasked with creating a country-wide celebration of the war, but Andrews noted that the only recognition of Black people will relate to slavery. This fourth series draws on Andrews's relationships with feminist groups at the time.

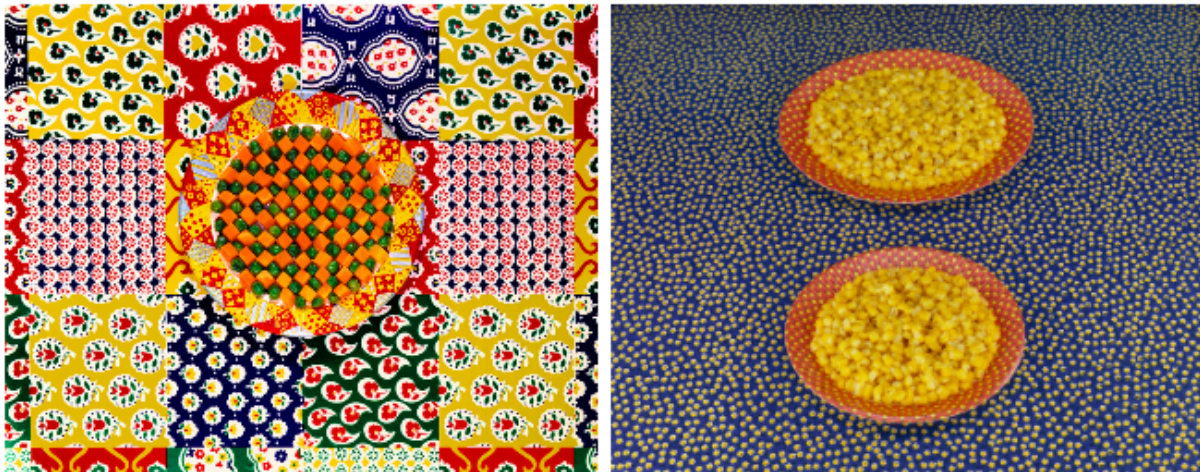
The monumental “Sexism” (1973) painting draws on the cartoonish and fantastical imagery of Hieronymus Bosch’s [“Garden of Earthly Delights”](#) (1490–1500) to visualize resistance and hyperbolize the ways in which American society views women. Phallic symbols abound, and women (in breast-shaped vessels) appear to steer incompetent-looking men toward their demise underneath a flesh-colored tarp. A natural landscape awaits beyond the pile. Colorful flowers and trees sprout up on the side of the cliff, perhaps a reference to the Garden of Eden.

A few other works in the show also rely heavily on 1970s cultural events. Most of the artworks in the exhibition, however, comment on something deeper, ultimately revealing how little has changed in the past 50 years.

Three 1978 photographs by Sandy Skoglund, presented by Ryan Lee Gallery, all showcase decidedly ’70s patterns — and food, although the decade is not exactly known for its gourmet offerings. The body of work is miraculously a reflection of just that. It’s a shockingly self-aware series that identifies the 1970s aesthetics that have lasted in our collective memory. The first work, “Two Boxes” (1978), ponders consumer culture, according to the Ryan Lee Gallery’s accompanying wall label. The second two photographs consider the normalization of processed food.



The show is spread across two loft spaces. (photo by Jenny Gorman, courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery)



Sandy Skoglund, "Peas and Carrots on a Plate" (1978) and "Two Plates of Corn" (1978), archival pigment inkjet, 22 x 28 inches, edition of 25 (images courtesy Ryan Lee Gallery)

It was in this decade that America began shifting away from Jell-O molded monstrosities and began moving towards “farm-to-table” dining. “Peas and Carrots on a Plate” (1978) and “Two Plates of Corn” (1978) both depict bite-size vegetables, appearing quite unseasoned and blanched, in vibrant hues. The carrots, peas, and corn look less like food and more like the color-blocked floral patterns behind them.

Other works in the show are less time-stamped. Jane Freilicher’s “Plants and Fish” (1973) is a homey and warm still life. Sylvia Snowden’s “M Street – Rosetta Williams” (c. 1978) is a commanding abstract expressionist painting that reveals layers upon layers of paint up close and a monstrous figure from afar.



Jane Freilicher, “Plants and Fish” (1973), oil on linen, 40 x 40 inches (photo courtesy Kasmin Gallery)



Sylvia Snowden, "M Street - Rosetta Williams" (c. 1978), acrylic and oil pastel on Masonite, 48 x 60 inches (photo courtesy Franklin Parrasch Gallery)

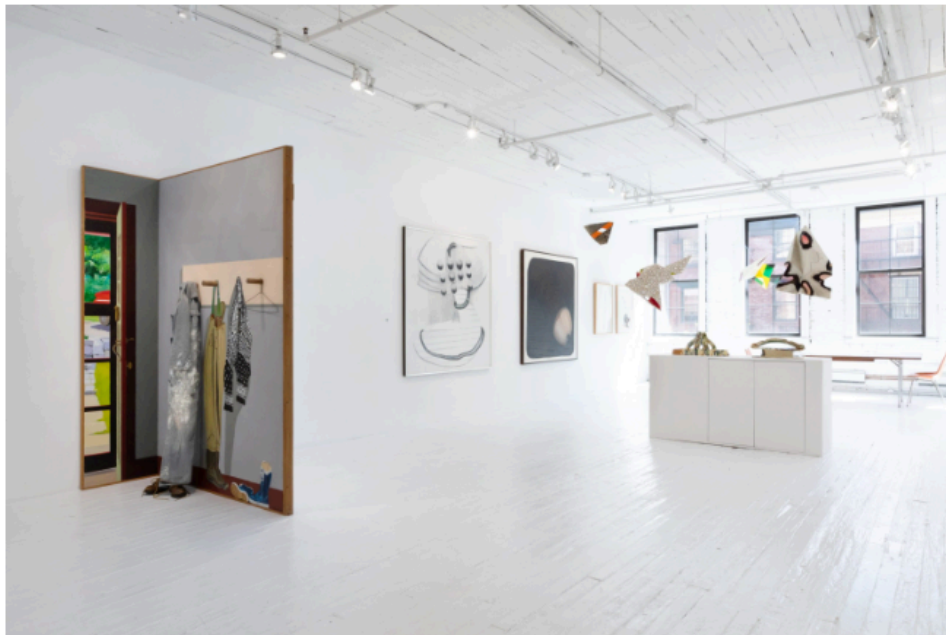


Eric Firestone Gallery added pieces to the exhibition, too — a contorted brightly painted canvas and an installation with a painter’s coat hung on a peg. Joe Overstreet’s “Untitled” (1970) is tied to both the ceiling and the floor, giving the work the striking appearance of being both weightless and impossibly heavy. The second of the Eric Firestone works — “The Wall” (1973) — is by Charles DuBack, an artist better known for his one-dimensional works. Throughout his multi-decade career, DuBack reflected larger trends in the art world, shifting from clean-lined abstraction, to figure painting, to landscapes. Here, DuBack seems to pay homage to the position of the artist. In the entryway of a home, DuBack has painted a cable knit sweater, galoshes, and a pair of boots. A real painter’s smock and a pair of leather boots are hung on a peg.

When I visited *That ’70s Show* on Wednesday, May 18, the show was mounted, but not yet open to the public. QR codes, wall labels, and checklists will guide visitors this weekend, and some artwork groupings will have a gallery representative nearby. The exhibition is on view through Sunday, May 21, and everyone is welcome.



Joe Overstreet's "Untitled" (1970) is tied to the ceiling and floor. (photo Elaine Velie/Hyperallergic)



Charles DuBack's "The Wall" (1973) juts out from the side of the gallery. (photo Jenny Gorman, courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery)