

# In A New York State of Mind

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This May was an excellent time to get a much needed breath of fresh air after languishing in COVID-19 lock down for more than a year. Liberated by the vaccine, Pigment International took a trip to New York to partake in just a smattering of the many art activities in the city that never sleeps. From exhibitions, to festivals, to commemorations the city never disappoints when it comes to the Black art experience.

Immediately after touching down we headed to the [New Museum](#) in the Bowery for the exhibition “**Grief and Grievances: Art and Mourning in America.**” The exhibit was conceived by noted curator [Okwui Enwezor](#), from Calabar, Nigeria, who at the time was contemplating his own mortality. The prolific curator, who upended the art world and their perceptions of what is contemporary art and who should be invited to exhibit, died in March of 2019 from cancer. His initial concept was an indictment of the divisive politics of the Trump presidency, but he also saw how that divisiveness was impacting the lives of Black people, creating a state of national emergency. “Black grief has been a national emergency for many years now, and many artists have addressed it in their work, he said at the time.

The curatorial advisors who shepherded the exhibition to its opening this February were **Naomi Beckwith, Massimiliano Giono, Glenn Ligon and Mark Nash.** The 37 artists featured in the exhibition are the artistic equivalent of Marvel’s Avengers, all art superheroes. They include **Basquiat, Kerry James Marshall, Theaster Gates, Carrie Mae Weems, Dawoud Bey, Kara Walker, Howardena Pindell and Julie Mehretu** to namedrop just a few of the amazing cast.

The concept of the exhibition, “that the condition of Black Life is one of mourning,” dovetails with our frequent lamentation of being sick and tired of being sick and tired. Yet viewing this exhibition is to know that these creatives ‘feel with us’ and are putting it all out there for the world to see. Scripture says, “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” This exhibition on ‘grief and grievance’ is one way the world should seek to understand. The exhibition runs through June 6, 2021.

With that here are some highlights:

Procession, 1968, acrylic on wood by **Jean-Michel Basquiat.**

**Kevin Beasley’s** Strange Fruit, 2015, an installation featuring Nike Air Jordan shoes in white and black with polyurethane resin, polyurethane foam, tube socks, shoelaces, rope, speakers, hyper cardioid and contact microphones, amplifier, patch cables and effects processors.

Photos from **Dawoud Bey’s** Birmingham Project, 2012

**Mark Bradford,** ‘Untitled’, Mixed Mediums on Canvas, 2020

**Rashid Johnson** – Antoine’s Organ, 2016, Black steel, grow lights, plants, wood, shea butter, books, monitors, rugs, piano.

**Kerry James Marshall**, Souvenir II, 1997 and Memento #5, 2003 – Acrylic, collage, and glitter on unstretched canvas banner.

**Julie Mehretu**, See Gold, Cry Black, 2019, Ink and Acrylic on Canvas.

**Howardena Pindell**, Autobiography: Water (Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts), 1988 Acrylic and mixed medium on canvas.

**Nari Ward**, Peacekeeper, 1995, Hearse, grease, mufflers, and feathers.

**Jack Whitten**, Birmingham, 1964, Aluminum foil, newsprint, stocking, and oil on plywood.

Should you be in NYC this Spring consider taking in some of these other art highlights:

The Art Students League of New York, in partnership with the **Romare Bearden Foundation**, is honored to present *Creating Community. Cinque Gallery Artists* on view May 3–July 4, 2021. The exhibition is the first introductory survey to focus on Cinque Gallery, the innovative non-profit artists' space dedicated to promoting the achievements of Black artists from its founding in 1969 until its closure in 2004.

A new work by conceptual artist **Sanford Biggers** that is sure to turn lots of heads was just installed at the entrance to the Channel Gardens at Rockefeller Center. *Oracle*—a 25-foot-tall cast bronze sculpture that weighs 15,280 pounds—is a continuation of Biggers' "Chimera" series.

**Basquiat's** *In This Case* headlines Christie's inaugural 21st Century Evening Sale at \$93,105,000. Christie's trailblazing new 20th and 21st Century week kicked off with a pioneering 21st Century Evening sale that totaled \$210,471,500 and saw records set for 11 artists, including Rashid Johnson, and Nina Chanel Abney.

Public Art: Park to Park – Includes artwork at Marcus Garvey Park and Harlem Art Park. Also, check out the mosaic “Spirit of Harlem” by Louis Del Sarte, on Frederick Douglass Parkway near 125<sup>th</sup> Street.

[Calabar Gallery](#) in Harlem (Locations in Brooklyn as well) is showcasing the works of Pamella Allen, British-Kenyan photographer **P. Wamaitha Ng'ang'a** and Congolese artist **Alexandre Kyungu Mwilambwe**. Calabar represents underserved artists locally and globally to include African, African American and Caribbean artists. Their mission is to provide a place for community, exhibitions, creative initiatives and projects.

*All photos courtesy of Pigment International except **Okwui Enwezor**, which is by Edward Keating/The New York Times*

