

THE NEW YORKER

Davina Semo: "Spring Art Preview"

Written by Andrea K. Scott

February 28, 2020

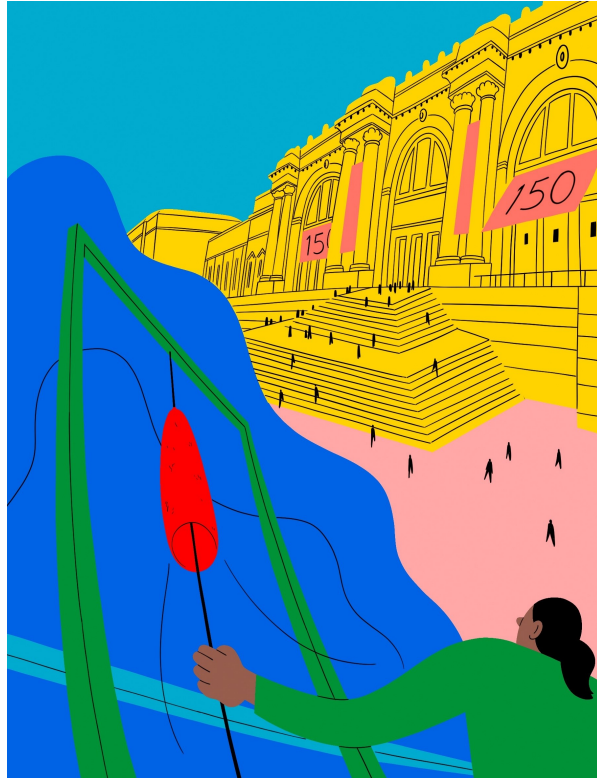


Illustration by Alva Skog

Shortly after the Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded, in 1870, Henry James wrote a prescient review of its first show, describing the selection of Old Master paintings as “an enviably solid foundation for future acquisition and development.” A hundred and fifty years later, those acquisitions span more than five thousand years. The building-wide exhibition “**Making the Met: 1870–2020**” highlights a cross-section of that encyclopedic collection, from a life-size limestone statue of the Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut, made circa 1479–58 B.C., to a bronze dancer by Edgar Degas, cast in 1922. (Opens March 30.)

Climate-crisis awareness and boho chic both fuel renewed interest in the tradition of *boro*, a ragtag quilting process born of necessity, in the wintry Japanese region of Tohoku. Fifty vintage examples are on view in “**Boro Textiles: Sustainable Aesthetics**,” at the Japan Society, alongside avant-garde piecework from such designers as Rei Kawakubo, Issey Miyake, and Yohji Yamamoto. (Opens March 6.)

Few velvet ropes (or disco balls) are more legendary than those at Studio 54. Open for less than three years (it closed in 1980), it remains an icon of glamour, glitter, and freedom, especially for the L.G.B.T.Q. community. The house of “Le Freak” lives on in the exhibition “**Studio 54: Night**”

Magic,” at the Brooklyn Museum, featuring six hundred and fifty photographs, fashions, film clips, soundtracks, and more. (Opens March 13.)

The times have caught up to the color-drenched mysticism of the American painter Agnes Pelton (1881-1961), who chose to work outside the mainstream throughout her career—first near the ocean in Water Mill, New York, and then in the arid climate of Cathedral City, California, near Palm Springs. The Whitney reintroduces her lucent œuvre in **“Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist.”** (Opens March 13.)

Roughly a quarter of the world’s prisoners reside in the U.S., a population that has soared seven hundred per cent since 1970. At MOMA PS1, the guest curator Nicole R. Fleetwood, a professor at Rutgers University, tackles this urgent subject in the exhibition **“Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration,”** which includes an extensive series of related public programs. (Opens April 5.)

Gentrification is synonymous with New York City—the irony being that the very artists who make a neighborhood magnetic are often later forced to relocate. A dozen contemporary artists contemplate this dilemma in **“After the Plaster Foundation,”** at the Queens Museum. The show’s title riffs on the nickname that the underground legend Jack Smith gave the SoHo loft where he filmed and staged performances in the nineteen-sixties—until he was evicted. (Opens April 5.)

The young Bay Area sculptor **Davina Semo** gives visitors to Brooklyn Bridge Park the gift of sound and vision in her project for the Public Art Fund: a series of cast-bronze bells installed along the waterfront, which people are invited to ring. (Opens May 5.)