

ART

uncertain whether they were witnessing a colossal breakthrough or a monumental joke. The spell wore off quickly. At the time of Péladan's death, in 1918, he was already seen as an absurd relic of a receding age. The show includes works by the painters Ferdinand Hodler, Fernand Khnopff, and Jean Delville, among others, and occupies one of the museum's tower galleries, in rooms painted oxblood red, with furniture of midnight-blue velvet. On the walls, the Holy Grail glows, demonic angels hover, women radiate saintliness or lust. The dark kitsch of the fin de siècle beckons. For all the faded creepiness, the moment is worth revisiting, because mystics like Péladan prepared the ground for the modernist revolution of the early twentieth century. *Through Oct. 4.*

Whitney Museum

"An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940-2017" This edifying exhibition, which opened on the eve of Boston's triumphant showing against a gathering of white supremacists, takes as a given the new relevance of protest art. The first work you encounter, Dread Scott's black-and-white flag, from 2015, is a near-replica of the banner that hung frequently between 1920 and 1938 from the window of the N.A.A.C.P. headquarters, on Fifth Avenue. "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday,"

it read; in his updated indictment, Scott inserts the phrase "by police." While this work stands alone, most of the others on view are grouped by social movement. One room is devoted to AIDS activism, including the heartrending agitprop of A. A. Bronson's billboard-size portrait, from 1994, of his emaciated friend Felix Partz surrounded by colorful quilts, taken several hours after his death. Elsewhere, quietly radical works by Mary Kelly and Howardena Pindell are installed alongside the Guerrilla Girls' blaring anti-sexist posters. "Protest" is broadly defined by the show's curators, and abstraction looks surprisingly powerful. Senga Nengudi's "Internal I," conceived in 1977, is a taut, weblike arrangement of brown panty hose, which evokes flayed skin. Melvin Edwards's nearby sculpture, "Pyramid Up and Down Pyramid" (remade for the show based on the 1969 original), is a chilling feat of Minimalism: barbed wire strung across corners creates geometric volumes. In the wake of recent events in Charlottesville—and Donald Trump's appalling response—such works suggest the potential for new monuments that might replace malignant symbols of the Confederacy. *Ongoing.*

Jewish Museum

"Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry" It's a good time to take Stettheimer seriously. The occasion is a retrospective of the New York

artist, poet, designer, and Jazz Age saloniste. It's not that Stettheimer, who died in 1944, at the age of seventy-three, needs rediscovering. She is securely esteemed—or adored, more like it—for her ebulliently faux-naïve paintings of party scenes and of her famous friends and for her four satirical allegories of Manhattan, which she called "Cathedrals": symbol-packed phantasmagorias of Fifth Avenue, Broadway, Wall Street, and Art, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. She painted in blazing primary colors, plus white and some accenting black, with the odd insinuating purple. Even her blues smolder. Greens are less frequent; zealously urbane, Stettheimer wasn't much for nature, except, surreally, for the glories of the outsized cut flowers that barge in on her indoor scenes. She painted grass yellow. She seemed an eccentric outlier to American modernism, and appreciations of her often run to the camp—it was likely in that spirit that Andy Warhol called her his favorite artist. But what happens if, clearing our minds and looking afresh, we recast the leading men she pictured, notably Marcel Duchamp, in supporting roles? What's the drama when Stettheimer stars? *Through Sept. 24.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Mary Heilmann

The artist, whose paintings are like songs for the eyes, aimed to be a post-minimalist sculptor when she first arrived in New York, from San Francisco, in 1968. But the scene's hard men rebuffed her. So Heilmann did what, at the time, you weren't supposed to: she put brush to canvas. This succinct, terrific show samples the early results of her efforts, in red, yellow, and blue, made between 1975 and 1978. The concentric compositions are minimalistic but also promisingly wobbly. The colors are as clarion as French horns in the morning. There's a retrospective, vicarious thrill of art history on the turn. Take that, fellas! *Through Oct. 28. (Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739.)*

Pat Steir

The esteemed New York painter's new series, "Kairos," demonstrates, once again, her knack for collaborating with both chance and gravity—to let a painting paint itself, as Steir says. On the ground floor, tall canvases feature intricate curtains of her hallmark vertical drips, which seem to simultaneously filter and reflect light. "Golden" dramatizes this effect with metallic paint; the mostly white "Angel" pays homage to Steir's exacting friend Agnes Martin with its diaphanous implacability. All the works on view, including the smaller ones upstairs, play with bifurcation, in lines, cracks, streaks of sediment, and chasms. "Trance Abyss" is the apt title of a poem by Anne Waldman, written in response to this new work; the poet will read it as part of a musical performance in the gallery on Sept. 19. *Through Oct. 21. (Lévy Gorvy, 909 Madison Ave., at 73rd St. 212-772-2004.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Polly Apfelbaum

The mod, pink-orange-and-black cover design of the progressive, if paternalistic, 1963 book "The Potential of Woman" is the template for Apfelbaum's radiant exhibition, the veteran artist's first with this gallery. The ground floor is filled with gouache drawings, all made this year,



Emily Mae Smith conjures Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's "Oedipus and the Sphinx" (1808) and a bewitched broom from "Fantasia" in her superbly weird painting "The Riddle" (2017), on view through Oct. 29 at the Simone Subal gallery.