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Cohen, Alina. “The Art World’s Most Daring — and Fun — Season.” *www.nytimes.com* (*T The New York Times Style Magazine*), 28 July 2016.

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An installation view of “Splotch,” on view this summer at Sperone Westwater — one of several quirky, creative group shows galleries are showing this season. Credit Courtesy of Sperone Westwater

“When I was a kid, we used to close in the summer,” says Marc Glimcher, who grew up in his father Arne Glimcher’s gallery. “All the galleries did. My father used to put everyone on unemployment.” (The family would live in Hawaii for the season, with one of his father’s business partners.) “Then they’d reincorporate the business every September and everyone would get hired again.”

Not so anymore. While the collectors are away, the curators will play — at least, that’s the mantra many New York galleries are adopting this summer. From Chelsea to Bushwick, quirky and creative group shows are invigorating what used to be a sleepy time for the art world. Rather than closing for the season, these days, gallerists work during the off months in order to get ahead of the demands of the international art calendar. “You have more activity behind the scenes,” says Sperone Westwater’s assistant director, Andrew Lee, whose team has met major art-fair deadlines in the last few weeks. And because many big-ticket buyers are out of town — “they’re all in Greece or the Hamptons,” Lee points out — directors have more room to get playful in the front of house.

For their summer show, Lee and his team brought in Eileen Jeng, a former employee who’s now the operations manager at the nonprofit art organization RxArt. Jeng secured a loan for a Sol LeWitt sculpture

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called “Splotch #3” and built a group exhibition, “Splotch,” around the piece. The show is “about the controlled and methodical process of creating a seemingly free-form mark or spot,” she says — and, notably, it includes artists beyond the gallery’s roster, including Lynda Benglis, Keltie Ferris and Angel Otero.



99¢ Plus Gallery partnered with its next-door neighbors, Florencia’s Flower Shop, for a horticulture-rich exhibition, “The Plant Show,” including Sean Gerstley’s “Oval Funnel Planter” (left). At right, installation views of Pace Gallery’s “Blackness in Abstraction” (top) and Hometown Gallery’s “Over the Hills” (bottom). Credit Clockwise from left: Courtesy of 99¢ Plus Gallery, Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy of Hometown Gallery

Likewise, Glimcher handed responsibilities at Pace Gallery for the season over to Adrienne Edwards, a Ph.D. candidate at New York University and an established curator unaffiliated with the gallery. Edwards didn’t need to worry about finances: “Let me just be very clear,” she says. “Pace gave me absolute carte blanche.” It’s a funny term to use, given the show she eventually came up with: “Blackness in Abstraction,” which assembles a group of monochromatic black works, created from the 1940s through the present, by artists ranging from Robert Irwin to Carrie Mae Weems to Oscar Murillo. The exhibition, based on her dissertation work, explores the role of the color across a range of artistic practices.

New spaces, too, are embracing the trend. To celebrate his Bushwick-based gallery’s first summer, Hometown’s Adam Yokell incorporated the season into his curatorial themes. The works in “Over the Hills” explore aspects of summer — its fleeting nature, its opportunities to escape, its encouragement to search and reflect. Also, it’s a “nice time for developing the community around the gallery,” he says, “creating a summer opening experience that feels festive.” In that spirit, the Bushwick-based 99¢ Plus Gallery partnered with its next-door neighbors, Florencia’s Flower Shop, for a horticulture-rich exhibition, “The Plant Show.” In it, Sean Gerstley’s work, “Oval Funnel Planter,” is indeed a functional planter, while

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a palm plant sits atop Cody Hoyt’s “Four by Four Palm.” And at David Zwirner, artworks by the gallery’s own employees get the spotlight in the aptly titled “People Who Work Here.”



Three works on display in Jack Shainman Gallery’s show “For Freedoms” (clockwise from left): Aida Muluneh’s “Strength in Honor,” 2016; Zoë Buckman’s “Champ,” 2016; Nari Ward’s “Mass Action,” 2016. Credit Clockwise from left: Courtesy of the artist and David Krut Projects, Johannesburg; courtesy of the artist and Bethanie Brady Artist Management; courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

Political themes have shaped other group shows during this particularly charged summer. “The Female Gaze, Part Two: Women Look at Men,” at Cheim & Read, features work exclusively by women that attempts to reverse stereotypical gender roles. Meanwhile, “For Freedoms,” at Jack Shainman Gallery, functions as a headquarters for the nation’s first artist-run super PAC and features works by collaborating artists. It’s rare for artists to implicate themselves in the political process so directly, says one of the super PAC’s founders, the artist Hank Willis Thomas: “We become part of the system hopefully as a way to critique the system.”

And earlier this summer, the Lower East Side’s CANADA gallery riled up the art world with its exhibition title, “Make Painting Great Again,” which partner Phil Grauer calls “obnoxious and kind of fun.” The gallery took the theme one step further and designed some swag. “We had a few dumb hats made, and they’re kind of hard to wear because people don’t read them. They just see the shape of the words.” It wasn’t quite the moneymaker he’d hoped — which, perhaps, is in keeping with the summer group show’s experimental spirit. “Didn’t go on to T-shirts,” he says. “Just kind of left it.”