

archives, some four million photographs, of Johnson Publishing Company, in the 1960s and 1980s, this organization masterminded two magazines, *JET* and *Ebony*, that were hugely significant in shaping 'the aesthetic and cultural languages of African American identity.' Gaber's self-abnegating show, touring from Miami's Fondazione Prada, is anchored by large, gorgeous photographs – deeply stylish images of beautiful black women – by two key editorial photographers working for Johnson, Moneta Sleet Jr and Isaac Sutton. But it also tests out different ways of engaging with the company's image trove in granular detail: hands-with-white-gloves spreads of fashion-sheet contact sheets, freestanding mini-archives where one can take out individual framed photos and prop them for contemplation, videos, vinyl wall-hangings, stacked stacks of vintage magazines. Aesthetic history here seems awake and processual, vivified in the present through viewer engagement. Gaber, whose own career shows he is nothing if not a super-savvy pragmatist, has formatted the show like an iceberg, and makes you want to participate, to unearth more images equal to the handful of swaggering ones on the walls.

Maybe it's generational, but gratifyingly hands-on exhibitions stand out for this viewer because I don't, as a rule, want to participate. It takes inventiveness or, as in **Clegg & Guttman's** intermingled presentation with **Kyaz Erhard Walther** at *NOB*, it takes a drum kit, *Cognitive Exercise No. 62* (syncopating with the machine beat, 2006, invites visitors to pick up the sticks and bash along to a metronome, set at your chosen speed (ignore that in favour of a freeform workout, as I did, and you're not doing the piece right). Rules align the pairing of artists here, which foregrounds the necessity and problematicity of agreed codes of being. Rules need not mean restriction, however. Walther's *First Work Set, 1963-65*, features folded canvas objects laid out on a larger piece of canvas; there are half a dozen, at one end, and it seems like the work's generous throw gauntlet – that you borrow parts of it and use them elsewhere, presumably freely – has been taken on by prior attendees. So, apparently, has Clegg & Guttman's double-edged *Humiliation II, 2008*, a kind of tapering barrel of a type that disreputable women were imprisoned within, in pairs, during the Middle Ages, until they learned to coexist with others.

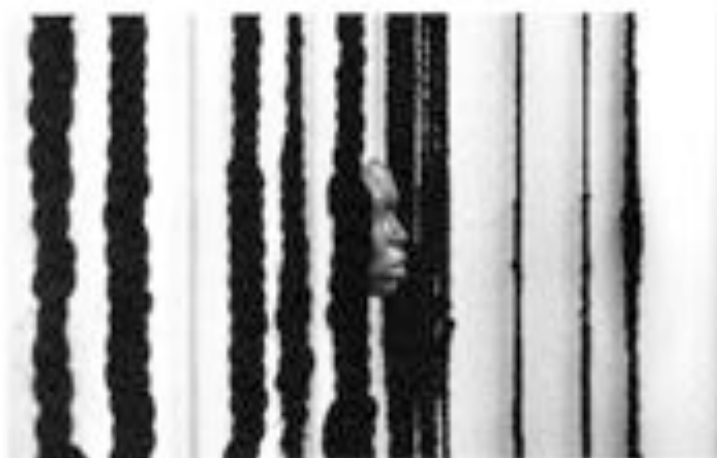
Unlike so much relational art of the 1990s in particular, such proposals seem rooted in what a human subject might actually want to try, rather than what the artist wants them to experience. It makes all the difference. When both Clegg & Guttman and Walther retreat, at different points in the show, into bodies of work that are rule-driven but whose interactions have occurred before we get there, we might well miss partaking – as in the former's set of official photographic portraits of statesmen and other figures, including Walther, which are commissioned but can be refused if the siter doesn't like their image. And maybe the notion of starling with a structure becomes particularly appealing if the larger infrastructure it is presented within – Gallery Weekend and its attendant boxes – feels like something in pressing need of revision from within. ■

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New York Round-up

Queer Thoughts • Bodega • Ludlow 38

The flyer for **Diamond Stingly's** 'Death' at *Queer Thoughts* is an image of the artist lying on what seems to be a surgical bed, eyes closed, with an exposed chunk of flesh below the brow and over



the bridge of the nose. The show's centerpiece, *Cephalophore*, is a bronze cast of (Stingly's) face mounted at head-height on one wall. Her face peers through lengths of braids hung on each wall of the room. The braids trail down, held by hooks on industrial metal conduits mounted high on the wall, about ten per rail, spaced around half a foot apart. They graduate down with different thicknesses, bulging and tapering organically and pool on the floor in front of the walls. The sculpture, *Kiss (Punishment)* ('Kiss' named after *Kiss the Snake in the Juniper Book*) made out of Kanekalon hair (a synthetic fibre used for adding braids to hair) has had different iterations in Stingly's works through a number of years. The closed eyes of the cast in *Cephalophore* make it read as a death-mask that she has left to be gazed upon – an image of the artist that doesn't look back at you. The idea of being on view also comes up in the press release, in a one-scene play script describing seven girls singing, one girl points at the audience and demands: 'Well, what the fuck are y'all looking at?' It's also about the general game of image and representation. A *cephalophore* is a saint who is represented as carrying their head in their own hands, signifying their martyrdom by beheading; here we're greeted by it at head height and it's the gallery that holds the head. The gallery becomes a body, adorned with hair extensions. The small space is a perfect fit for the exhibition, forcing a pared-down and concentrated focus. In the press release, one girl seems to die – 'she's only hurt and don't know maybe she did die but either way something will come back' – then immediately springs back to life. Maybe the show stages the death of her image, but her art is still around.

Against Attachment at *Ludlow 38* is an arrangement of sculptures by **Ser Sarpas**. The front space is vacant apart from an

Diamond Stingly
Against Attachment
 2023 installation
[view](#)

Ludis Derahmane
New Year 2023
[installation view](#)