

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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July 31, 2018



Pascale Marthine Tayou

Through Aug. 22. Richard Taittinger Gallery, 154 Ludlow Street, Manhattan; (212) 634-7154, richardtaittinger.com.



Pascale Marthine Tayou's "Plastic Tree" (2018) in his solo exhibition, "Colorful Line," at the Richard Taittinger Gallery. Shark Senesac

The work of the Cameroon-born Pascale Marthine Tayou illustrates the complications of the global art model in which artists adopt a handful of industry-approved elements — found objects, pop culture, some form of political critique — and inject local details. In his solo exhibition, "Colorful Line," at Richard Taittinger, the formula sometimes works. More often, it does not.

An exuberant wall installation, "Plastic Tree" (2018), stands at the entrance, with plastic bags in bright colors attached to tree branches, a simple and disturbing reminder of how little things, like the single-use plastic bag, add up to huge environmental consequences. The vivid colors of this work also connect with the show's title, which refers to the "color line" of racial segregation, as well as to King Louis XIV's original "Code Noir" (1685) decree that defined the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire.

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Race and color are best addressed in the "Kids Mascarade" series of photographs that show children in red-soiled landscapes wearing plastic animal masks that appear suspiciously, menacingly Caucasian. Less successful works use traditional forms of sub-Saharan African sculpture, but with found objects like pots and bowls, collaging the ethnographic with the post-colonial in a simplistic and familiar move that feels reminiscent of the Indian artist Subodh Gupta.

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What goes unquestioned here is context: the collision of the global-gallery universe and the street or junk heaps of other worlds. Mr. Tayou straddles both (he lives in Belgium as well as Cameroon), but what about his audience? Most of the work here feels vapid and generic, not questioning enough the soil and the ground we stand on, be it red, black, white or concrete.

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