

Last call: Catch these Philly art exhibitions before it's too late

by [Edith Newhall](#), Updated: March 21, 2019



PHILADELPHIA PHOTO ARTS CENTER

Occasional visitors to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts' Hamilton Building may not realize that its upstairs hallway is a gallery that regularly plays host to some of PAFA's more absorbing shows.

The latest arrival, "Intimate Immensity," organized by sculptor and PAFA faculty member Alexis Granwell, is immediately recognizable as an exhibition. It's also one of the few shows I've seen there that fully — and often thrillingly — engages this blah rectangular space and its distracting open entrances to other galleries.

Newhall, Edith "Intimacy Writ Large", The Philadelphia Inquirer. March 21, 2019

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This time, the art is the only diversion.

Granwell's inspiration for her show is an essay of the same title by the influential French philosopher

Gaston Bachelard, which led her to artists who evoke a sense of intimacy in works that on their face seem bolder or more strikingly expansive.

She selected some of the show's pieces from PAFA's collection, including paper works published by PAFA's Brodsky Center, and paired them with her own sculptures and works by sculptors Fabienne Lasserre, Michelle Segre, and Brie Ruais.

It is these three artists who offer the show's most compelling examples of intimacy in immensity.

Lasserre veers between large, freestanding oval structures that bring to mind stretched canvases and cheval mirrors, and twisty freestanding and hanging forms that look like line drawings writ in air and strangely alive and probing.



Fabienne Lasserre's "I0" (2016), at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Segre's large, freestanding sculptures involve found objects and share some similarities with Lasserre's work, particularly their extenuated forms and fabric-wrapped surfaces. If Lasserre seems a descendant of Calder, Segre's childlike exuberance and naivete is reminiscent of Miro.

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At first glance, Ruais' monumental wall-mounted pieces, from which parts have been ripped (the torn-away parts are also on display), might appear to be abstract paintings composed from some extremely thick medium. They're actually fabricated from stoneware, with roughed-up, tactile surfaces that offer direct evidence of Ruais' strenuous physical engagement with her work. I'd say she's caught the true spirit of intimate immensity.

Lynda Benglis is one of the PAFA-affiliated artists in the show. Her *Swamp Road* and *Alewive Brook*, both published by the Brodsky Center, are small, wall-mounted sculptures, but their twisted shapes over chicken-wire armatures suggest human torsos and great physical strength.

Granwell's own papier-mache sculptures on wood pedestals are also of modest scale. They hint at human forms, too, though hers look like abstractions of wrestlers in contorted poses.

Other works are so in-your-face they appear too large for their circumscribed boundaries, as though they'd burst out into a room if you let them. That's especially true of a Louise Bourgeois drypoint of an enormous cat face that fills an entire print, from PAFA's Art by Women Collection.

It's also true of another work from that collection, an untitled painted porcelain test plate made by Judy Chicago during the production of her iconic feminist work *The Dinner Party*. The plate's image depicts an artichoke-like plant, but there's no missing the vagina at its center.

"Intimate Immensity" also features an essay by Bea Huff Hunter and works by El Anatsui, Chakaia Booker, Joan Snyder, and Sun You.

Through April 7 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 118-128 N. Broad St., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. 215-972-7600 or pafa.org.

Finale for a visionary feat

An exhibition at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center from the yearlong Women's Mobile Art Museum project has a week to go, and I'd urge you to go see it.

The center and artist-in-residence Zanele Muholi reached out to Philadelphia women and gender-nonconforming people who had been unable to access arts education, offering a paid apprenticeship in photography, video, museum studies, and public speaking. From the 59 who applied, 10 were selected.

The project launched in February 2018 and has yielded a remarkably poignant and polished show of photographs, personal narratives, and poems.

The exhibitors all seem to have made the most of their apprenticeships. I was impressed by their singular visions — and wouldn't be surprised if all maintain careers as photographers, writers, or both.

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Philadelphia's institutions should take note of visionary projects like this. They change lives.

Through March 30 at Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, 1400 N. American St., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. 215-232-5678 or philaphotoarts.org.

Two one-painter shows

Two solo shows by Philadelphia painters are also closing soon and shouldn't be missed.

Sarah Gamble has Fleisher/Ollman's space entirely to herself for her second solo show there. She has filled it with paintings that are now devoid of recognizable images.



CLAIRE ILTIS

Sarah Gamble's "Untitled" (2018) at Fleisher/Ollman.

These new works suggest visions of outer space and hallucinatory experiences, in seeming solidarity with such artists as Vija Celmins and Yayoi Kusama. They also have an affinity with those images from nature in which people see Jesus. In one ostensibly abstract painting, I saw Manhattan skyscrapers as viewed from Central Park.

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Evan Fugazzi's second solo show at Gross McCleaf Gallery is also a departure — in his case, from black-and-white abstract paintings that recalled Franz Kline to brilliantly colored color ones that align him with such colorists as Mary Heilmann, Howard Hodgkin, and Stanley Whitney.

Sarah Gamble through March 30 at Fleisher/Ollman, 1216 Arch St., 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays. 215-545-7562 or fleisher-ollmangallery.com.

Evan Fugazzi through March 30 at Gross McCleaf Gallery, 127 S. 16th St., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-665-8138 or grossmccleaf.com.

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