

Time Out

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment
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New York

**INSIDE
THIS WEEK:
387 free
events!**

EXCLUSIVE!

Whoopi Goldberg
and Charles Dutton
on *Ma Rainey's*
backstage
brouhaha

PLUS

Denim's
new wave

Restaurant
rip-offs

Winter sports
for dummies

**Bridget
Moynahan**

goes undercover
in *The Recruit*



"The Life and Work of Charles Henri Ford"
 Mitchell Aligus Gallery,
 through Feb 1
 (see Chelsea).

Why is artist Jack Pierson the one who, as the press release states, has "selected and arranged" the Charles Henri Ford show at the Mitchell Aligus Gallery? Pierson is best known for his deceptively casual color photographs documenting handsome young hipsters in honey-lit or glamorously seedy settings, and for re-arranging plastic letters from vintage commercial signs to spell plaintive words like *solitude*.

Ford, who died last September at 94, was known less for his efforts as a visual artist than for his work as a poet and founding editor of *View* (1940-47). A legendary arts magazine of Surrealist bent, which sported glorious covers de-



Charles Henri Ford, "Poem Posters," 1966.

signed by artists such as Man Ray, André Masson, Fernand Léger and Pavel Tchelitchew (Ford's companion for 26 years), *View* introduced American readers to the likes of e.e. cummings, Jorge Luis Borges, Jean Genet and Paul Bowles. There is nothing from *View* in this exhibition; instead, the show was selected from the mass of materials Ford left behind in his Dakota apartment. Aligus's small front room features ephemera and portraits of the artist

by others. Ford's own idiosyncratic art, meanwhile, dominates the main gallery. In the charming "Scrapbook Collages" (1934-35), Ford superimposes

snapshot cutouts of himself and his travel companions, Tchelitchew and the supremely elegant Cecil Beaton, on illustrations of quintessential Spanish scenes. But in this exhibit, the late 1960s and '70s rule. Works from that era include six intensely psychedelic cut-up "Poem Posters" (1966) and the haunting "Layout and Camouflage" (1976-77). Installed in a grid on one wall, this series of photographic portraits, each shot against one or more projected slide image, spans the generations from Paul Cadmus and Philip Johnson through Robert Rauschenberg and Ultra Violet, to Debbie Harry and Robert Mapplethorpe.

The show's contents attest to Ford's life and work as connecting threads in a mostly lavender bohemian elite that stretches from Cocteau to Warhol and beyond. Perhaps in an effort to extend Ford's legacy to the present, or merely to take his place at the party, Pierson has included a piece of his own, an allusion to the weight of history in the form of a sign that reads 16 TONS.—David Deitcher

Shahzia Sikander, "SpiNN"
 Brent Sikkema, through Feb 8
 (see Chelsea).

Hybrids abound in "SpiNN," an exhibition of new watercolors, drawings and digital animation by the Pakistani-born artist Shahzia Sikander. Mixing disparate styles and media in exquisitely inventive blends, Sikander revels in aesthetic and cultural cross-fertilization.

Nemesis (2002), one of Sikander's first entirely digital pieces, translates the colors, forms and characters of traditional Indo-Persian miniature painting into a captivating DVD. A simple narrative unfolds over the course of a few minutes: Starting with two rabbits perched atop an ornate geometric border, a menagerie of interlocking animals gradually appears. Tigers, ducks, humans and dragons accumulate like a living jigsaw puzzle. Finally, these familiar and fantastic creatures coalesce into a vibrant elephant that rears up,

tossing its rider, before the scene vanishes and the cycle begins again. Although she uses new technology, Sikander re-creates the age-old experience of slowly perceiving an intricate painting during a lengthy viewing process.

Most of the exhibition is dedicated to the artist's more familiar method of mingling traditional media with contemporary subjects. In a group of works on hand-made, highly textured cotton paper known as *washi*, Sikander infuses the delicate technique of watercolor with topical relevance. Small paintings with laconically ironic titles like *Utopia*, *Usurpia* and *No Fly Zone* set winged figures from both Hindu and Muslim iconography against backdrops of American flags and industrial vignettes. This mixture of East and West resonates with Sikander's experience as a Pakistani woman



Shahzia Sikander, *Utopia*, 2003.

living in Brooklyn, and with life in our heterogeneous postcolonial world. Such amalgams also highlight a forsaken tradition of cultural dialogue on the Indian subcontinent: Although Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan are now separate, antagonistic entities, their religious and artistic traditions are historically entwined. By resurrecting this connection, Sikander's hybrids not only speak to the present but also point to a forgotten past.—Laura Auricchio

focus was the World Trade Center and its oppressively authoritative omnipresence, a topic the show indirectly addresses by presenting a series of extremely solitary acts of artistic intervention (typically documented in photo or video) in various metropolitan environments.

It is the louche figure of Arthur Rimbaud, however—not De Certeau—who is the real motivating force behind this exhibition. In his activities within the Paris Commune of 1871, Rimbaud strove to link rarefied aesthetic appreciation with the brutal truth of journalistic reportage. The *poète maudite* appears here in the guise of a face mask worn in a photograph by David Wojnarowicz—another artist for whom the construction of identity was an act equally of political defiance and of transcendent beauty. Both he and Rimbaud resisted any codified role of worker or artist and insisted that all experience must be multifaceted and free of boundaries—a resistance intended, in large measure, to evade the oppression of a nondemocratic political sphere.

Except for Valerie Tevere (whose videotaped questioning of the denizens of Amsterdam about the relative values of public and private yields predictably banal results), all the artists in "Walking in the City" effectively resist the complacent citizen's role so disparaged by Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz. Alex Villar awkwardly climbs building facades and telephone booths; Valie Export assumes cumbersome poses that transform her body into mock-architectural ornaments; Adrian Piper walks the street dressed as an Afroed hipster, muttering memorized phrases from her diary. Both Yayoi Kusama and Kim Sooja simply stand still in crowds, forcing the throngs to move around them.

These days we are so transfixed by our collective trauma at the WTC's absence that the possibility of individual thought and action seems almost boorish. This canny exhibition suggests that only through solitary acts of defiance can we restore the unity of the urban experience.—Noah Chasin

Malick Sidibé
 Jack Shainman Gallery and Kennedy Boesky Photographs, both through Feb 8 (see Chelsea).

Judging from the sheer joie de vivre of his photographs, Malick Sidibé's portrait studio in Bamako, Mali, must be one of the happiest hangouts on earth. Each and every man, woman and child who ever dressed up to sit before his camera, whether in traditional finery or funky Western gear, appears so glamorous and self-possessed it's hard not to wish for a session of one's own.

However, most of the pictures in these two complementary exhibitions date from the postcolonial period of the 1960s and '70s, after Mali (once French Sudan) gained its independence. They record, in fascinating detail, a wholesale countercultural revolution. Unlike his mentor Seydou Keita, Sidibé did not confine himself to his studio, making formal portraits. He also took his camera out to neighborhood clubs and nearby beaches, photographing a generation of young people risking punishment at the hands of their Muslim elders to embrace the forbidden: Jimi Hendrix and James Brown, pompadours and Afros, bell-bottoms and bikinis, boom boxes and cigarettes.

About a dozen recently minted black-and-white prints of Sidibé's beach and party scenes comprise the show at Kennedy Boesky, while Shainman has 130 vintage studio and club prints. Most are no larger than a postcard and are newly "framed" with tape, string and cardboard, as is customary in Mali. The studio shots (including a striking self-portrait) date from the mid-1960s to 2002, when Sidibé dutifully photographed his more conservative clients in fabulous headdresses and voluminous gowns, while aiding and abetting his younger subjects' wish to be seen in trendier getups. The difference in attitude between these sitters and their more traditional counterparts makes as indelible an impression as their pictures. Shown side by side, these images give American viewers the most intimate acquaintance with modern Mali that they're likely to get this side of Ali Farke Touré and Salif Keita, whose infectious music is as spirited as Sidibé's photographs. In fact, you can almost dance to them too.—Linda Yablonsky



Malick Sidibé, *Vues de profil*, circa 1975.



David Wojnarowicz, Arthur Rimbaud in NY (*Dog Fight*), 1978-79.

"Walking in the City"

Apex Art, through Feb 1 (see Soho). This small but thematically tight group show curated by Melissa Brookheart Beyer and Jill Dawsey takes its title from a text by theorist Michel de Certeau. His 1974 *Walking in the City* argued for the importance of understanding urban space not as an abstract entity but as an aggregate of individual experiences. De Certeau's

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY MITCHELL ALIGUS GALLERY; COURTESY BRENT SIKKEMA; COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY; COURTESY P.P.O.W.