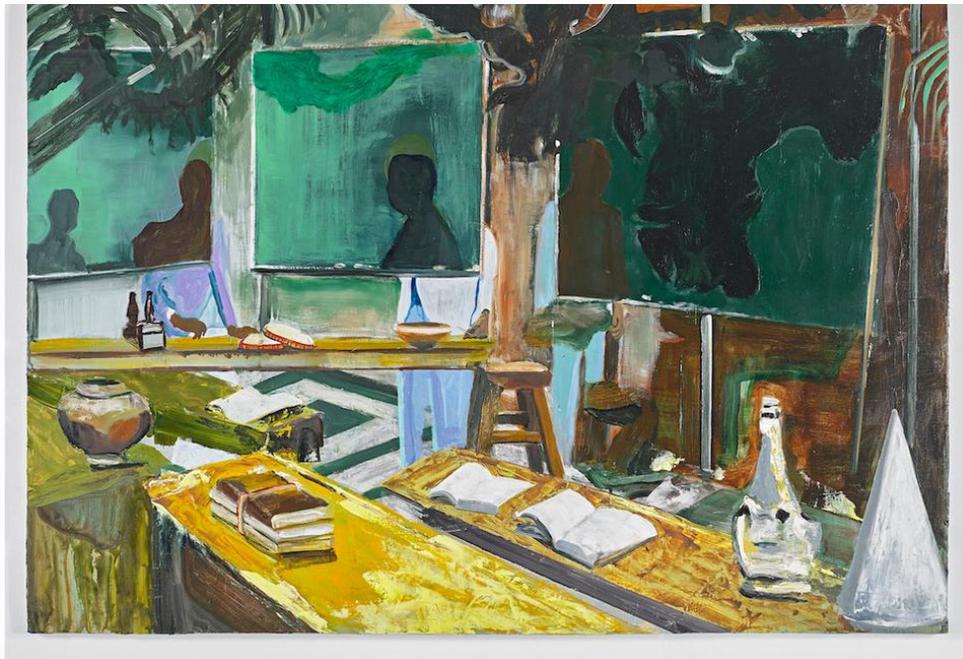


# Forbes

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## Smaller Museums And Galleries Shining In Chicago's Flourishing Arts Scene



Maia Cruz Palileo, *All the While I Thought You Had Received This*, 2018. Oil on canvas over panel, 33 x 48 in., on show at Monique Meloche Gallery. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY, CHICAGO.

When you think Chicago, you think big. Big buildings, big pizza, big museums.

Chicago's [Museum of Science and Industry](#) is the largest of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Both [Maximo the Titanosaur](#), the world's largest dinosaur, and [SUE](#), the largest and most complete *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton, call the city's Field Museum of natural history home. When the [Shedd Aquarium](#) opened, it was the nation's largest.

Same goes for art. [The Art Institute of Chicago](#) hosts the largest collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artworks outside of France.

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Institutions of that scale cast a shadow. Existing within that shadow can be found a vibrant museum and gallery scene, two examples of which are hosting noteworthy shows this month.

The Smart Museum of Art at The University of Chicago highlights its spring exhibition calendar with *Solidary & Solitary: The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection*. The show focuses on African-American artists working from the 1940s until today with a particular emphasis on abstraction.

Allison Gass is the Director of the Smart Museum.

“Over the last year, the Smart has recommitted itself to addressing omissions in the canon of art history. *Solidary & Solitary* is such a special exhibition for us because we have found such great partners in this endeavor—the activist collectors Pamela Joyner and Fred Giuffrida. Their comprehensive collection includes works by the most significant African-American abstract artists working over the last century through today. We’re thrilled to have the opportunity to share work of this caliber that challenges us to look again at the history of modern and contemporary art, with our broad audiences here on the South Side of Chicago.”

Traditionally speaking, Abstract art is defined as making no attempt to represent a visual reality. The “abstract” art featured in this exhibit doesn’t strictly adhere to that definition.

*Solidary & Solitary* “explores abstraction, broadly understood, as a meaningful political focus, rather than a stylistic preference. For black artists, abstraction is charged with the refusal of representation that is socially dictated, both by racist stereotypes of the dominant culture, and the pressure from within the black community to create positive imagery” according to a press release from the museum.



Maia Cruz Palileo, *Magic Fire*, 2019 Oil on canvas, 52 x 50 in. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY, CHICAGO.

Another underrepresented viewpoint takes center stage at Monique Meloche Gallery where Filipino artist Maia Cruz Palileo receives her first solo show in her home town, *All the While I Thought You Had Received This*.

“I was introduced to Maia’s work on an early 2017 trip to New York to make studio visits and the moment we stepped into her Brooklyn studio we were mesmerized by her lush paintings filled with mysterious figures and signifiers,” gallery owner and founder Monique Meloche said. “I was struck by her distinct viewpoint—by a female artist of color investigating her own Filipino heritage and questioning the colonizing effects of the Philippine-American war as well as the problematics of colonization in general.”

Helping inspire Palileo’s work for this show was research she conducted in Chicago related to the history between the U.S. and the Philippines. She found Filipino artist Damian Domingo’s watercolors to be among the most positive reflections of the island’s native people, [the photographs of Dean C. Worcester](#), an American scientist who traveled extensively through the Philippines around the turn of the 20th century, the least.

“The Worcester archive is a collection of exploitative and dehumanizing photographs. I was drawn to the people in the pictures with the impulse to pull them out and away from this historical framework. With the detailed and loving care of Domingo’s watercolors in mind, I began to draw figures, plants, landscapes, and other elements from the archive. Then, I cut out each drawing, creating a new library of cutouts: figures, plants, animals, interiors, boats, moons and mountains. The pieces were then placed in various arrangements and recorded via graphite rubbings. This process allowed for the cutouts to be combined into potentially infinite visual narratives. This is the first time I’ll be showing the cut outs along with the rubbings and the paintings.”

The exhibit’s title has a fascinating history of its own. Palileo has long collected stories from family members. She asked her grandmother to write what amounted to an autobiography. A portion of this request included a 10-page description of the house her grandmother grew up in.

“She had sent it to me in the mail, but forgot to put my apartment number on it, so this was a post script note explaining it had been returned to her, but she was resending,” Palileo said. “These words resonated as I revisited the letter while in the middle of preparing for this show. I hear the title spoken in her voice, imagining that she’s saying, ‘wait a minute, I thought you already knew all this, I never told you?!’ What else had she thought I had received, but never did and are those things lost or are they recoverable?”

While Palileo left Chicago for New York like many artists before her, that trend is reversing according to Carol Ehlers, Regional Director of Chicago and the Midwest for international auction house Phillips.

“Traditionally, artists left Chicago in order to get national or international attention. This is no longer the case and Chicago is reaping the benefits of having many internationally recognized artists working in and contributing to our community. [Theaster Gates and his Rebuild Foundation](#) is an exciting example of an artist enhancing our community. Another reason that the Chicago art scene is so dynamic today is the influx of young curators and museum directors who are broadening the spectrum of exhibitions and engaging a larger portion of our community.”

Ehlers specified [The Museum of Contemporary Art’s](#) upcoming Virgil Abloh exhibition, *Figures of Speech* (June 10–September 22, 2019), as an example. This will be the first museum exhibition devoted to the groundbreaking fashion designer, DJ and music producer. She additionally applauded Julie Rodrigues Widholm, director and chief curator of [DePaul \(University\) Art Museum](#), who has made opening nights at her museum free and open to the public.

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Ehlers and Meloche both recommend Dawoud Bey's current show at the Art Institute of Chicago, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*.

The gallery side of the Chicago art scene has been keeping up as well.

"Chicago has a great history of artist run spaces and apartment galleries in addition to commercial galleries and one only needs to check out [Gallery Weekend Chicago](#) to keep up to date on the most vital contemporary art galleries in the city," Meloche said.

"Chicago is rapidly emerging as a major cultural center for the arts, with a constellation of extraordinary museums of all scales and identities across all sides of the city, not to mention incredible artists, art schools, great collectors, and institutions of higher learning," Gass said. "The zeitgeist is defined by a collective willingness to delve deeper into art that engages with social concerns and to do the important work that helps bring new and overlooked voices to the fore, like [AfriCOBRA](#) and the Black Arts Movement."