

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Martha Schwendener, Will Heinrich and Jillian Steinhauer
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Romuald Hazoumè

Through Oct. 13. Gagosian, 821 Park Avenue, Manhattan; 212-796-1228. gagosian.com.



Romuald Hazoumè's "Nettoyeur" comments on the relationship between African and Western art. Credit 2018 Romuald Hazoumè/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and ADAGP, Paris; Zarko Vijatovic

The Yoruba artist Romuald Hazoumè's "Nettoyeur," one of 16 "masks" made from found plastic jerrycans that make up his latest New York show, is an astonishingly economical comment on the relationship between African and Western art. With a straight handle for a nose above the container's own gaping round mouth, and a semicircular indentation for drooping brows, the work becomes not merely a face but an expressive one. Originally golden yellow, its surface now has a complex texture of abrasion and encrusted gray filth. Instead of the feathers that adorn many of Mr. Hazoumè's other masks, a sinuous wooden brush with thick, dirty bristles is wired to its dome.

Using an everyday tool as a decoration rather than for its intended purpose is analogous to the way 20th-century European artists decontextualized African masks. Substituting that tool precisely for the medium it's meant to work upon is a pretty good critique of Western culture in general: Mr. Hazoumè replaces hair with brush just as we look to empty aesthetic symbols instead of a spirit world.

Still, Mr. Hazoumè, who lives and works in the Republic of Benin, ably plays both sides of the fence: With or without their satirical bite, his masks are also tremendously entertaining. Eight men's pipes mimic a crest of slicked-down hair in "Cocotamba." Two projecting round buttons on the surface of "La Trompe" read as beady little eyes, while another two just disappear. The mouth of "Bisou," crushed into an open triangle, offers an eternal kiss.

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Source: [The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com)