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A Bouquet of Group Art Shows Near Houston Street

These expansive exhibitions, in galleries on or near the Lower East Side, create an immersive sense of art and the reawakening art scene.

By **Roberta Smith**

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June Leaf's "Woman and Infant in Lifeboat," 1995, at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects. The storm-tossed painting is one of her best, Roberta Smith writes. Credit. June Leaf and Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects

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'Dark Was the Night'

Through Sept. 6 at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, 208 Forsyth Street;
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Nearby, in the northern regions of the Lower East Side (near Houston Street), and to the other extreme in terms of size and finish is "Dark Was the Night," at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects. The title, seemingly cued to the current national, nay, the global, mood, is from the gospel blues song "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground," written by Blind Willie Johnson, who, in the 1927 recording, has an eloquent way with slide guitar and wordless humming.

You don't always know what to expect in this diminutive somewhat funky shop of a gallery, except that it will probably be some distance from the blue-chip and the slick. The show wends from the small front space to the smaller back office, past the desk, above the flat files and a small sink (presently overseen by a wonderful little night sky painted by Susanna Coffey) and back to the desk again. Among the better-known artists, represented by mostly modest works, are Arshile Gorky, John D. Graham, Tony Smith and Jack Goldstein, whose "Untitled (lava trails)" presents a field of black rived by scorching orange trails of lava. It pictures catastrophe while punning on abstraction.



E.M. Saniga's "A Dancing Pointer" (2005-6). It seems to depict a bit of deserted frontier at dusk where a man playing a guitar coaxes a hunting dog onto its hind legs. Credit. E.M. Saniga and Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects

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But the lesser-known works tend to carry the day, including June Leaf's storm-tossed "Woman and Infant in Lifeboat" (1995), [one of her best paintings](#) — as is Paul Resika's "Fallen Angel" (1997-99), which conjures Icarus's plunge. Jan Müller's "[The Great Hanging Piece](#)" (1957) is a totem of eight small canvases that picture various demonic faces and tableaus. The show's newest name belongs to Stipan Tadic — a transplanted Croatian and recent graduate of Columbia University's M.F. A program. His "[Medika Dance](#)" (2019) evokes a dark alley leading to a late-night club, an image out of German Expressionism by way of Underground comics; it depicts an alternative cultural center in Zagreb and is based on Pieter Bruegel's "Peasant Dance."

In contrast, E.M. Saniga's evocative "[A Dancing Pointer](#)" (2005-6) can be seen to depict a bit of deserted frontier at dusk where a man playing a guitar coaxes a hunting dog onto its hind legs — a bit of quiet before the storm of progress. Balancing out the paintings are photographic works — each adding its own unsettling note — by Zoe Leonard, David Wojnarowicz and Richard Morrison.

Read the review online here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/arts/design/nyc-galleries-art-shows.html>

View the exhibition online here:

<https://shfap.com/events/dark-was-the-night/>