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5 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Cecily Brown's new paintings, Sam Gilliam's sculptures and monochromes, Gideon Appah's otherworldly vistas, Tishan Hsu's first museum survey and works from the Purvis Young trove.

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It's Thanksgiving, plus a pandemic. Check online before you go to a gallery this weekend. Many spaces have shortened their hours or are closed for the holiday.

Gideon Appah

Through Dec. 5. Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-7400; miandn.com.



Gideon Appah's "Another Place," from 2020, in the show "Blue Boys Blues." Gideon Appah and Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Many of the painted scenes in "Blue Boys Blues," the Ghanaian artist Gideon Appah's first solo show here, are inspired by his life in Accra, the country's capital. There are nightclub revelers mid-cigarette. Homebodies lolling in underwear. But there are stranger sights, too: otherworldly vistas that have the larger-than-life feel of formative memories and the potent symbolism of dreams.

Unlike their Black counterparts in Mr. Appah's more realistic portraits, these dreamscapes' inhabitants are mostly greenish-blue, like the verdigris of weathered bronze. In this fictional cosmos, skin color doesn't range between black and white. Rather, bodies turn from black to blue, as people move from the real world into mythic realms. Throughout, the artist's loose painting style leads to nice moments of

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

surprise. In “Teen Smoking on an Imaginary Street,” for example, unexpected traces of orange paint interweave with other brush strokes to portray the branches of a faraway sapling peeking between a palm tree’s half-desiccated fronds.

As galleries have started mounting a sustained attempt to give Black figurative painters the recognition they deserve, one worries that institutional zeal translates into something more detrimental behind the scenes: unfair pressure placed on these painters to stay the course, their own desires be damned. So it’s heartening to see Mr. Appah’s paintings wander widely. At one moment, he seems to be sampling the limbless torsos and barren horizon lines of European surrealist painters; at the next, he’s delving into childhood recollections. Memory has been a prominent theme in Mr. Appah’s work for a while now. That focus serves him especially well in 2020, with so much of the present world off limits.

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