

## 5 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Julie Mehretu's prints; Lee Lozano's drawings; paintings by the Florida Highwaymen; sculptures by Hugh Hayden; and a survey of protest art.



Julie Mehretu's "Six Bardos: Hymn (Behind the Sun)," from 2018. Julie Mehretu and Gemini G.E.L. LLC

Someone — surely an artist — once said that the best criticism of a work of art is another work of art. If so, the excellent exhibition of prints here that Julie Mehretu made at the Gemini G.E.L. workshop from 2008 to 2018 is usefully critical of the paintings that dominate her current midcareer survey at the Whitney Museum.

Mehretu has never stood still as an artist, but the prints she began making in 2008 have been consistently stronger than her paintings in every way: touch, spatial illusion, color and especially

scale. They exude a kind of lushness, avoiding the brittle impersonality and formal melodrama often found in her paintings. These last two qualities were mostly banished in the black-on-grey paintings seen at Marian Goodman in 2016, but they have resurfaced in her latest canvases.

The prints, meanwhile, have mostly gone from strength to strength. The earliest works in the show are three small dry point etchings from 2008, 2010 and 2012 remarkable for their variety of delicate marks and their brinkmanship between abstraction and representation. (They conjure the exploded landscapes in Otto Dix's "War" etchings of 1924.) The show's high points are "Six Bardos," a suite of large aquatints from 2018 inspired by the six intervals between life and death in Buddhism. They suavely combine graffiti, calligraphy and fragments of images into effortless tangles of lines that sometimes glow from within. Five are beautifully colored, the sixth and final one, "Last Breath," is a dense, all-black tangle that nonetheless levitates. That title aside, the "Bardo" prints have a pulse that too many of the paintings at the Whitney lack.

ROBERTA SMITH