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Art in Review



HIROKI KOBAYASHI/SALON 94, NEW YORK

"Material," a collection of art, artifacts, textiles, furniture, books and garments organized by Duro Olowu at Salon 94 Freemans.

Duro Olowu: Material

Salon 94 Freemans ·
1 Freeman Alley, between the
Bowery and Chrystie Street,
Lower East Side
Through March 31

If the ultra-Conceptual, under-visual, often color-free curatorial approach endemic to New York gallery group shows is wearing thin, spend some time sorting through "Material," the walk-in amalgam of art, artifacts, textiles, furniture, jewelry, books and garments assembled by the London-based lawyer-turned-fashion-designer Duro Olowu. More pop-up shop than exhibition, the dense presentation moves through time and across continents (Europe, Africa, North America). It is an inspired exercise in cross-pollination and recycling.

For example, risqué photographs from the 1950s by the Italian designer Carlo Mollino are here, along with Martino Gamper's furniture, which consists of cut-up and reassembled Mollino chairs. The carved painted coffins by the Ghanaian artist Paa Joe — including a giant camera — are juxtaposed with Laurie Simmons's photograph of walking objects — including a giant camera. The brilliantly colored cast mortar and styrofoam stools

of Sarah Kueng and Lovis Caputo double as abstract sculptures, while Matthias Merkel Hess's handsome ceramic re-dos of plastic hampers and milk crates qualify as sculptures that might make good planters. Portable they're not, in contrast to the small burly exercises in jubilation that Ludovica Gioscia conjures by simply combining bright crumpled paper and wallpaper paste. Katherine Bernhardt contributes abstract paintings loosely based on Moroccan rugs; James Brown is represented by large handsome watercolor collages on linen; and Tony Cox weighs in with bold, paintinglike embroideries of yarn and canvas. The multitented fashion editor and writer Michael Roberts adds collages of pink flamingos.

Lavishly appointed color photographic portraits by Philip Kwame Apagya and Juergen Teller conduct fruitful dialogues with black-and-white vintage portraits by the Malian photographer Hamidou Maiga from 1973 and by the Paramount Photographers studio of Lagos, Nigeria, from around 1950. Among all this, and much more, Mr. Olowu presents dresses of his own design that typically and distinctively combine bold, contrasting printed fabrics, encapsulating the paradisiacal culture clash that rules the room.

ROBERTA SMITH