

Vibrant Worlds: Sojourner Truth Parsons at Esther Schipper

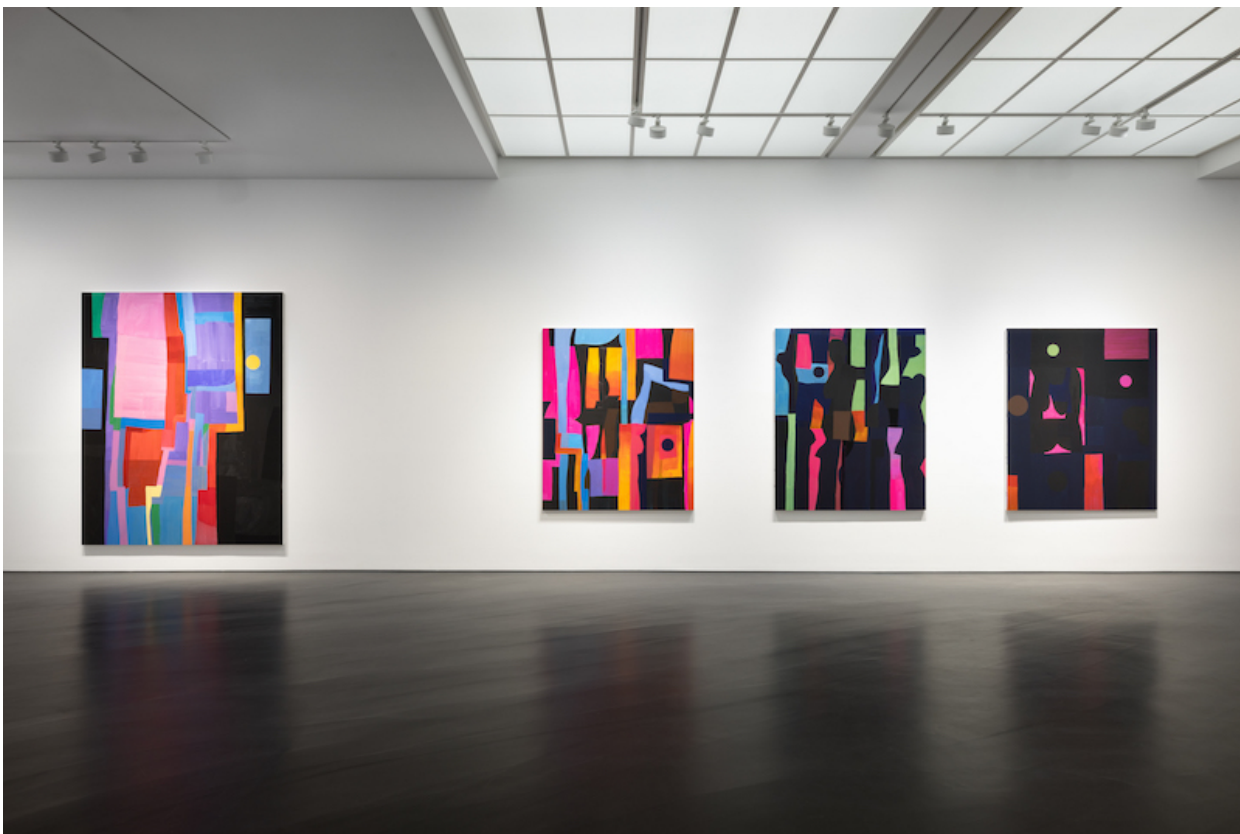


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by Eva Szwarc // June 30, 2023

The heat of a summer night in the city, a fleeting silhouette of a woman by her window, the slit of dying light between the gap of two buildings. These are some of the images evoked in Sojourner Truth Parsons' small but exuberant exhibition. 'If nobody wants you you're free' presents nine large paintings—and one series of smaller paintings—as an entirely new body of work and the artist's most abstract yet. The playful treatment of shape and colour creates emotive yet ambiguous landscapes, onto which visitors inevitably cast their own projections.



Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free,' installation view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023 // Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

Parsons is deft at playing with the intensity dial of colour. Whereas in parts a softened palette appears more naturalistic, elsewhere hot pinks and bright orange offer tanginess that feels artificial. For the most part, this sense of place is delivered by the sharp colours, allowing thoughts of fluorescent lights and loud advertisements to surface. Few explicit references are made; in 'You will get older' (2023), blocks of dark blues and black assume rolled-up high-rise buildings and through the oblong window of

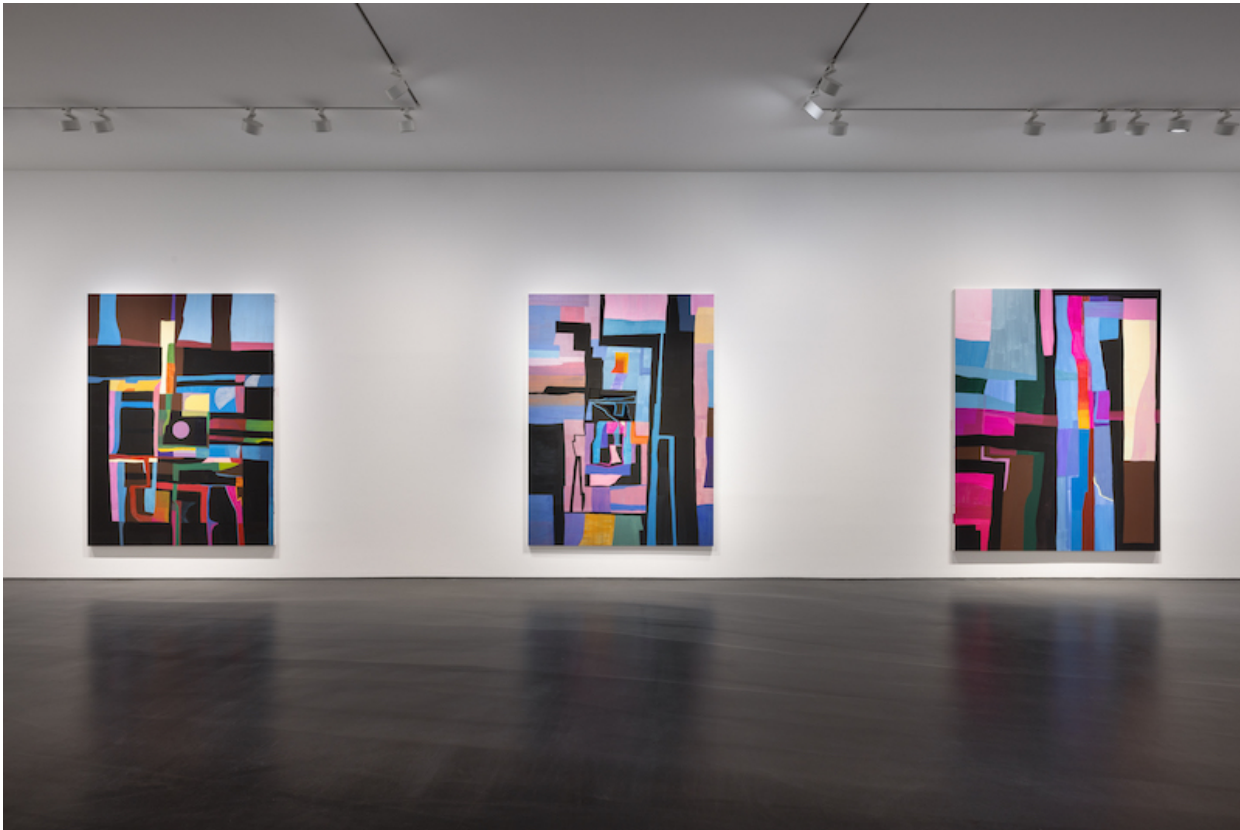
one, the moon (or a dusty sun) is glimpsed. In 'Pain III' and 'Rain on Leaves', the shapes of a woman are segmented but discerned.

The smaller series of paintings, titled 'End of April beginning of May,' pepper one wall of the gallery like a meditative interlude. Nearly exclusively painted with deep blues and black on black, the paintings have a dash of brightness here and there: the illumination of a candle's lit wick or a series of overlapped, colourful circles, as though an object reduced to its unfocussed bokeh. A playfully positioned black frog reappears in the shrouded night. The series offers us a quiet space in the dark, the title speaking to the anticipation of longer, lighter days that will stretch out once more.



Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'End of April beginning of May,' 2023, acrylic on canvas, set of 15 paintings, 76,3 x 61,5 x 3,5 cm (each, 15 parts), exhibition view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023
// Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

Threaded together, the titles read like snippets from a poem. If the paintings were to be untitled, a touch of the personal would be lost. 'You will get older,' 'Beginning of the end,' 'Drinking alone I,' 'Pain III': each of these sparks a sensation, invoking something both universal and vague enough to elicit a personal response or insertion from the viewer. This works to the power of Parson's abstract paintings which, in the atmosphere they conjure, invite visitors to connect their own dots of meaning together.



Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free,' installation view at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2023 // Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul, photo © Andrea Rossetti

There are instances in which the worlds of the work stammers. In 'The wind blows it rattles, I close my eyes' and 'Life knows how to live here,' the outskirts of a painting work as a frame in which a smaller, more intricate one is placed. One offsets the other in a way that feels irresolute. The eye is left without quite knowing where to settle. Perhaps, given the artist's self-proclaimed love for edges, this is part of the intention. Edges can visually segment, clarify and even simplify, but they also have the power to obstruct, confuse and unsettle. It comes back to a certain sense of playfulness, controlled by colour and shape and microscopically skewed by the attention to detail—artwork titles, for example—on which Parsons has a steady grip. In this sense, the artist sets the scene, inviting us into a vibrant world, within which we each may come away with our own sense of place.

Exhibition Info

Esther Schipper Berlin

Sojourner Truth Parsons: 'If nobody wants you you're free'

Exhibition: June 8-Jul. 6, 2023

estherschipper.com

Potsdamer Str. 81e/3rd Floor, 10785 Berlin, [click here for map](#)