

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

# What is art? Contemporary Art Museum has answers

By Calvin Wilson St. Louis Post-Dispatch



“XXL SUPERFLAT PANCAKE” a mural curated by St. Louis native, Katherine Bernhardt for the Contemporary Art Museum’s 60-foot-long Project Wall.

What is this thing called art? The question has been posed countless times, only to elicit answers that inevitably come down to individual taste. What viewers take away from an artwork depends, to a large and often unacknowledged extent, on who they happen to be.

So it's not a stretch to suggest that each of the current exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis is likely to have its admirers. Works by photographers Deana Lawson and Louis Cameron and painters Katherine Bernhardt and Nicola Tyson are on view through April 16. The Lawson, Tyson and Bernhardt exhibitions are on display in the Main Gallery; Cameron's photographs are featured in the Front Room.



"Oath" (2013) by Deana Lawson. Inkjet print, mounted on Sintra, 40 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago.

Lawson, who is based in Brooklyn and whom ArtNews has called “one of today’s most thrilling emerging photographers,” creates images that capture the essence of their African-American subjects — or at the very least, a version of that essence that comes across as uncannily right.

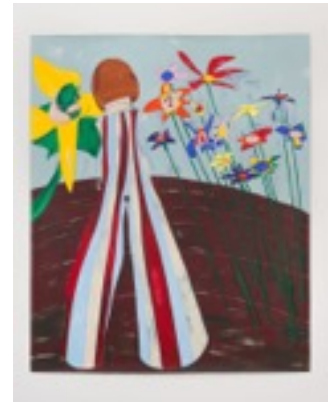
“Cortez” depicts a young tattooed man straddling the roof of an automobile. “Jouvert, Flatbush, Brooklyn,” a portrait of a party scene, is reminiscent of painter Ernie Barnes’ “Sugar Shack” — which was adapted for the cover of Marvin Gaye’s 1976 album “I Want You.”

The New York-based Tyson, who was born in London, takes a playful approach in her paintings and drawings. The self-explanatory and vividly surreal “Figure With Pigeon” sidesteps the horrific to arrive at the comical — both the person and the bird would likely test the limits of facial recognition technology.

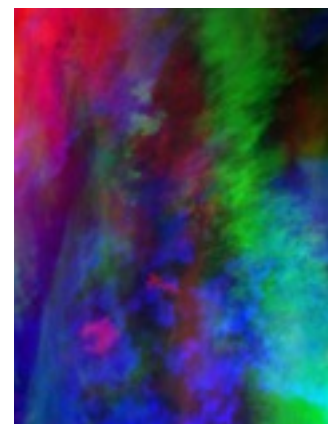
St. Louis native Bernhardt is represented by “XXL SUPERFLAT PANCAKE,” a mural created for the museum’s 60-foot-long Project Wall. The piece, which incorporates images ranging from a toucan to a brand-name battery, reflects the influence of graffiti artists such as Keith Haring.

“Actually, when I was making (the mural), I was thinking of him a lot,” Bernhardt says. “He painted everywhere and on anything. His painting was fast, and I’m kind of like that, too.”

Cameron employed up-to-the-minute technology — a cellphone — in coming up with the photographic images in his intriguingly ethereal “Clouds” series. The Berlin-based photographer is also a contributor to, and curator of, “The Poster Project presents.” Positioned across the lobby from



“In The Garden” (2014) by Nicola Tyson. Acrylic on linen, mounted in frame. 85 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Susan Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.



“Clouds #2” (2016) by Louis Cameron. Archival inkjet print on paper, 39 3/8 x 29 1/2 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

“Clouds,” the politically themed exhibition includes the portfolios “I Am ...” and “Immigration.”

On display in the museum’s Education Gallery is “ArtReach: I Am,” an exhibition in collaboration with local public schools.

**What** Works by Deana Lawson, Katherine Bernhardt, Nicola Tyson and Louis Cameron •

**When** Through April 16; gallery hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Wednesday and Saturday–Sunday and 10 a.m.–8 p.m. Thursday–Friday • **Where** Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 3750 Washington Boulevard • **How much** Free • **More info** 314-535-4660; [camstl.org](http://camstl.org)