

ELEPHANT

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Make Sure to See These Shows in New York This February

By Sam Falb

Reframe is a monthly column in which contributor Sam Falb discusses timely openings to view in New York. Each edition offers commentary on the latest exhibitions, performances, and installations. Dynamic and ever-evolving, the content reflects the fluidity of the market it travels through.

Welcome back – this month’s edition reads much like a downtown gallery walk, with our guest recommender saving us from this exclusive title (more from Lauren below). While many will soon be spreading their wings toward Zona Maco and Frieze LA, New York’s galleries continue to launch their own storytelling endeavors across an array of compelling shows. From a garage door installation featuring worm-eaten wood to a truly perplexing, life-size rabbit sculpture, no medium or technique is too novel for you, reader. Down a flight of stairs on Hester Street, a NAFTA-oriented show meets the moment of politics in-extremis. Over on Walker Street and up an elevator (past the previously-covered TIWA Select and Kapp Kapp), a symphony of skulls and vixen-forward characters can be found. Raw, textured experimentation meets polished poise this month, setting up salons of thinking, questioning, and marveling throughout this period.



Fred Lonidier, N.A.F.T.A #02 "Hyundai Piece," 1997/2000. Photographic panel, 9 parts, each 43 x 48 inches (109.22 x 121.92 cm). Edition of 3. Photo courtesy of the gallery and artist.

Maxwell Graham Gallery: N.A.F.T.A. (Not A Fair Trade For All) (January 22 – March 1)

Fred Lonidier's brazen, determined showcase features the lives and struggles of northern Mexico's maquiladoras (low-paid factory workers caught at the intersection of duty-free and tax-free agreements between the US, Canada, and Mexico). The artist's photography, strips of film, borrowed imagery like GM's "Mark of Excellence! / iSimbolo de Excelencia!" and news clips all converge to illustrate the wrestle between worker and owner, capitalist market triumph, and ongoing controversy of this type of socioeconomic infrastructure. For Lonidier, "What stands out the most dramatically is the complete circumvention of quite progressive Mexican labor laws." He aims to communicate this hypocrisy and lay bare the exploitative mechanisms that sustain it, forcing viewers to confront the truths behind globalized labor systems. Five decades of Lonidier's work have traced labor movements, laws, and the fight for better conditions for workers in the region. Through his lens, the daily realities of maquiladora labor—low wages, unsafe conditions, and relentless corporate control—are not just documented but politicized, transformed into a call for action. The pieces are not static, but homing beacons (and aesthetically intriguing to be sure, given the collaging of newsprint, industrial imagery, clip art, borrowed logos and referential symbols). If one is ready to engage, they demand thoughtful consumption, critique, and ultimately, a commitment to impactful change.