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THE NEW SEASON

THE TIMES'S CRITICS AND WRITERS TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT'S COMING SOON IN ART, POP MUSIC, TV AND VIDEO GAMES

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The New Season: Art

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Museums Depart From the Obvious

The coming months promise discoveries, old and new.

COMING AFTER A HO-HUM stretch in museums, the 2013-14 art season promises an unusually interesting mix of material from the distant past and art that engages with a politically fraught present. As the months go by, we should get a sense of what our art institutions can do when they depart, even a little, from the obvious.

The surprises start with what won't be there. Astonishingly, those box-office artists in residence Matisse and Picasso are on leave of absence, though their seats will be kept warm by familiar Modernist peers, with solo shows by Balbus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (opening Sept. 25), Braque at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Feb. 16); Léger at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Oct. 14); Magritte at the Museum of Modern Art (Sept. 28); and Robert Motherwell (with early collages, his best work) at the Guggenheim Museum (Sept. 27).

Traveling much further back in time at the Met, I'm particularly looking forward to "Medieval Treasures From Hildesheim" (Sept. 17), which will bring together sacred objects associated with one of the great churches of Western Europe. If the result has anything like the impact of the museum's Basel cathedral treasury display of several years back, the show will be one of the stealth discoveries of the year.

"Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections," at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, with bejeweled religious and secular work, should generate a comparable glow. As should "Yoga: The Art of Transformation," a visual overview of a spiritual discipline that grew from esoteric beginnings in ancient India to become an international phenomenon. The exhibition opens at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, on Oct. 19, and travels to Cleveland and San Francisco.

Other shows take internationalism as their theme. The Met's "Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800," culled from the museum's deep closets, is one (Sept. 16). Another is "Kongo Across the Waters," which opens Oct. 22 at the Harn Museum at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and draws on little-studied archaeological material to document the rise of the powerful Kongo kingdom in West Africa, its early contacts with Europe, and its far-reaching influence on the history of the African Americas.

African-American history is a natural focus in a season that coincides with the half-century anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The subject is front and center



WANGCHI MUTU

in "Witness: Art, Activism and Civil Rights" at the Brooklyn Museum (April 6 to Aug. 10). And it's implicit in "Tell It With Pride: the 54th Massachusetts Regiment and August Saint-Gaudens's Shaw Memorial" at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. This small show takes a close-up look at a sculptural homage to an ill-fated Union Army unit in the Civil War. Although the monument carries the name of the regiment's white leader, Robert Gould Shaw, the soldiers he led, and died with, were black (Sept. 15 to Jan. 20).

Reminders that the full achievement of civil rights — pertaining to race, class and sex — remains very much a work in

progress comes through in exhibitions of contemporary art. The photographer Carrie Mae Weems makes this the propelling theme of an extraordinary retrospective, encompassing three decades of African-American life, that arrives at the Guggenheim on Jan. 24. In a very different way, Wangchi Mutu, a young artist born in East Africa, blends ethnicity, sexuality and colonialism in her fantastically inventive collages, seen at the Brooklyn Museum starting Oct. 11.

All these elements will certainly figure into "Ruffneck Constructivists," a group show about the complications and pervasiveness of "racial" thinking, which is be-



CORBIS OUTLINE/PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS

Clockwise from top, John F. Kennedy campaigning in 1960; Art Spiegelman, self-portrait from "Maus," 1989; Arm Reliquary of Saint Bernard German (Hildesheim), about 1194; Wangchi Mutu's "Riding Death in My Sleep," 2002.



ART SPINGELMAN AND WANGCHI MUTU



ARM RELIQUARY OF SAINT BERNARD GERMAN (HILDESHEIM), ABOUT 1194; WANGCHI MUTU'S "RIDING DEATH IN MY SLEEP," 2002

ing organized by the artist Kara Walker for the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (Feb. 12) and should have particular resonance in the wake of the death of Trayvon Martin and its aftermath. And politics is, inevitably, soaked into the fabric of the two-part "Radical Presences: Black Performance in Contemporary Art." Part 1 was scheduled to open at the Studio Museum in Harlem on Friday, and Part 2 at Grey Art Gallery, at New York University, on Nov. 14, when it will overlap with the run of Performa 13, New York City's performance art biennial (Nov. 1 to 24).

Performa itself, in its fifth edition this fall, would do well to take a lesson from another concurrent show, this one opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on Oct. 31. Titled "Rituals of Rented Island:

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