

eric firestone gallery

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Eastward, Ho! Even Art Is Leaving for the Hamptons

by Ted Loos

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EAST HAMPTON, N.Y. — The art collectors were finally coming out of hiding here recently, albeit quietly and tentatively. The artists were, too. The lure? All of a sudden, they have a lot more gallery options lining the immaculate streets of this famously upscale summer town, a seemingly unexpected development in the middle of a pandemic. Since the beginning of June, five major art galleries have opened here: Pace, Skarstedt, Van de Weghe, Michael Werner and Sotheby's, all arms of New York art powerhouses. And more are on the way soon, in Montauk (Amalia Dayan and Adam Lindemann's new venture, South Etna Montauk) and Southampton (Hauser & Wirth).

"Selfishly, I'm totally into it," the artist Rashid Johnson, a Bridgehampton resident, said of the new spaces.

"I miss seeing good art." Mr. Johnson, like every civic-minded person I met, was wearing a mask.

New York's top dealers, artists and collectors have long vacationed here. But now that they have been living here during the pandemic, some gallerists are for the first time seeing the Hamptons as "something more than a playground," the artist Clifford Ross, a longtime area denizen, said. I drove out for the day to check out the newly burgeoning scene [...]

{...} None of the dealers seemed fazed by a lack of crowds.



Varnette Honeywood's "Family Time" (1984) in the window at Eric Firestone Gallery in East Hampton. The painter was known for her saturated colors and vivid representations of Black family life in Los Angeles. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Eric Firestone — who has had a prime corner location in East Hampton for 10 years — said: "If it's a great beach day, people aren't coming in. And the newcomers will figure that out."

Mr. Firestone also has a gallery in Manhattan, and said he specializes in "postwar American artists, with strong emphasis on people who were missed or slighted, like Joe Overstreet and Mimi Gross." He currently is showing work in East Hampton by the African-American painter Varnette Patricia Honeywood (1950-2010), whose works celebrating Black life were included in the set decoration for "The Cosby Show."