

MARTOS GALLERY

Novick, Illana, "The Life of Kathleen White as Told Through Her Art and Nan Goldin's Photographs," *Hyperallergic*, January 18, 2018

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ART

The Life of Kathleen White as Told Through Her Art and Nan Goldin's Photographs

A pair of exhibitions at Pioneer Works showcases Kathleen White's commemorative artworks incorporating the hair of deceased friends and Nan Goldin's photographs of White, who died in 2014.



Spirits of Manhattan: Kathleen White, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018 (all photos

© Dan Bradica)

In the Victorian era, deceased loved ones were mourned and remembered with hair jewelry, their strands lovingly woven into necklaces, bracelets, even walking sticks. A century later, as artist Kathleen White's close friends began contracting a mysterious, debilitating virus, she started saving locks of hair and accessories, using them to create mourning jewelry for the age of AIDS. The resulting sculptures are featured in *Kathleen White: Spirits of Manhattan*, currently on view at Pioneer Works in Red Hook.



Spirits of Manhattan: Kathleen White, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018

Hair of all colors, textures, and shapes line the space's second-floor gallery, including a nest of braids, buns, and other tangles salvaged from hairbrushes. White collected blonde curls and strands of straight auburn hair lined with pink bows, which hang on nearly imperceptible string from the space's wood-beamed ceiling, like Edison bulbs in a particularly macabre

farm to table restaurant, or perhaps a baby's crib mobile. One pair of curls is shaped into a heart; I could imagine tiny fingers stretching up to reach for them. Another friend's hair is in a hairnet, another in a bonnet, others hardened by the effects of years of hairspray and dye. A tan suitcase sits in a corner of the space, its cargo of mostly blonde and curly wigs spilling out onto the floor, as if the ghosts of White's loved ones are trying to escape.



Spirits of Manhattan: Kathleen White, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018

The tendrils of hair in White's work are surprisingly expressive. The pieces are messy yet reverent, an entire generation of artists, writers, performers, and more rendered in curls, knotted strands, wrapped in yarn, or braided.

There are more literal portraits, too, drawn in crayon layered on thick and looking like masks. But the hair mobiles are White's most tender portraits.



Kathleen: Nan Goldin, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018

On the third floor, in a smaller gallery, Pioneer Works is showing Nan Goldin's photographic portraits of White (who died of cancer in 2014). In an image installed near the front of the room, White stands in a turquoise bathing suit, surrounded by a veil of sunlight seemingly amplified by Goldin's flash, so bright I was sure I could see floaters at the corners of my eyes. On the opposite wall, in the image "Kathleen Modeling the Mona Lisa" (2015), White imitates the inscrutable smile of Leonardo da Vinci's mysterious sitter as the sun casts dramatic windowpane shadows across the wall behind her. To facilitate the comparison, a reproduction of the iconic

Renaissance portrait hangs alongside Goldin's photo, creating a playful diptych.



Kathleen: Nan Goldin, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018

A couple of images over from the Leonardo homage, White is gleaming in “Kathleen at BBar.” Her pale face, framed by strands of blonde hair, is so overexposed compared to her black top that her head seems to be floating above her body. In another Goldin photo, White is in her studio, deep in concentration. In all of these settings Goldin photographs her friend reverently, whether she appears glamorous in a bathing suit or busy working in her studio.

White and Goldin were close friends, and this pair of exhibitions was conceived as a conversation. The two groups of work may not be in dialogue exactly, but they are related. If White's show is a kind of memorial to her friends who were dying or those she feared might be soon, Goldin's

photos are a kind of memorial to White. Both bodies of work are tributes to people who knew they might not have much time left, but made art as if they had all the time in the world.



Kathleen: Nan Goldin, Pioneer Works, New York, December 10, 2017–February 11, 2018 (photo © Dan Bradica)

Kathleen White: Spirits of Manhattan and Nan Goldin: Kathleen are on view at Pioneer Works (159 Pioneer Street, Red Hook, Brooklyn) through February 11.