

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in January

By **Walker Mimms** and **Martha Schwendener**

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This week in Newly Reviewed, Walker Mimms covers Forrest Bess’s Jungian visions, Carroll Cloar’s mystical pointillism and Alex Hutton’s acrobatics.

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Carroll Cloar

Through Feb. 15. Andrew Edlin Gallery, 212 Bowery, Manhattan; 212-206-9723, edlingallery.com.

A warm New York welcome to Carroll Cloar (1913–93), the Arkansas lithographer who, discovering color in 1940s Mexico, settled in Memphis to conjure the American South in muted and mystical pointillist paintings.

Long a trophy of regional collections, and an off-view secret in those of New York, where he spent some of the 1930s, Cloar has had no solo show here for 35 years. These six paintings on Masonite and eight pencil studies flaunt his poetic devotion to landscape. In “Sunday Morning” (1969), dry-scraped grasses and dotted weeds line the dirt road like aerosol droplets. An angular red okra plant and a wall of stippled foliage dominate “Charlie Mae Looking for Little Eddie” (1969).

The environment is as finely detailed as the protagonists who seem to accept their roles within it: the parishioners filing down that weedy lane toward church, the girl coaxing a stray goat from those bushes.

The result is a secondhand, jury-rigged sort of realism, not the social kind we more readily attribute to Eldzier Cortor, or other contemporaries who dealt plainly with the cotton fields and Black provinciality of Southern oral

history. Cloar worked from photo albums and childhood memory, and he painted what it feels like to recall being told a story.

One well-chosen pair of works indicates Cloar was doing his memory thing in conscious opposition to Surrealism. His autobiographical “Mama, Papa is Blessed” (1960) satirizes the French painter Yves Tanguy’s “Mama, Papa is Wounded,” while Cloar’s “Pale Hose, Pale Writer” (1960), named to play on Katherine Anne Porter’s novella “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” expresses a painterly absurdism: The White Sox batter at the center of Cloar’s panel, his cheek bulging with chew, turns it into a trolling pun about America’s favorite sport.



Carroll Cloar, “Charlie Mae Looking for Little Eddie,” 1969, acrylic on Masonite. Estate of Carroll Cloar, via Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York