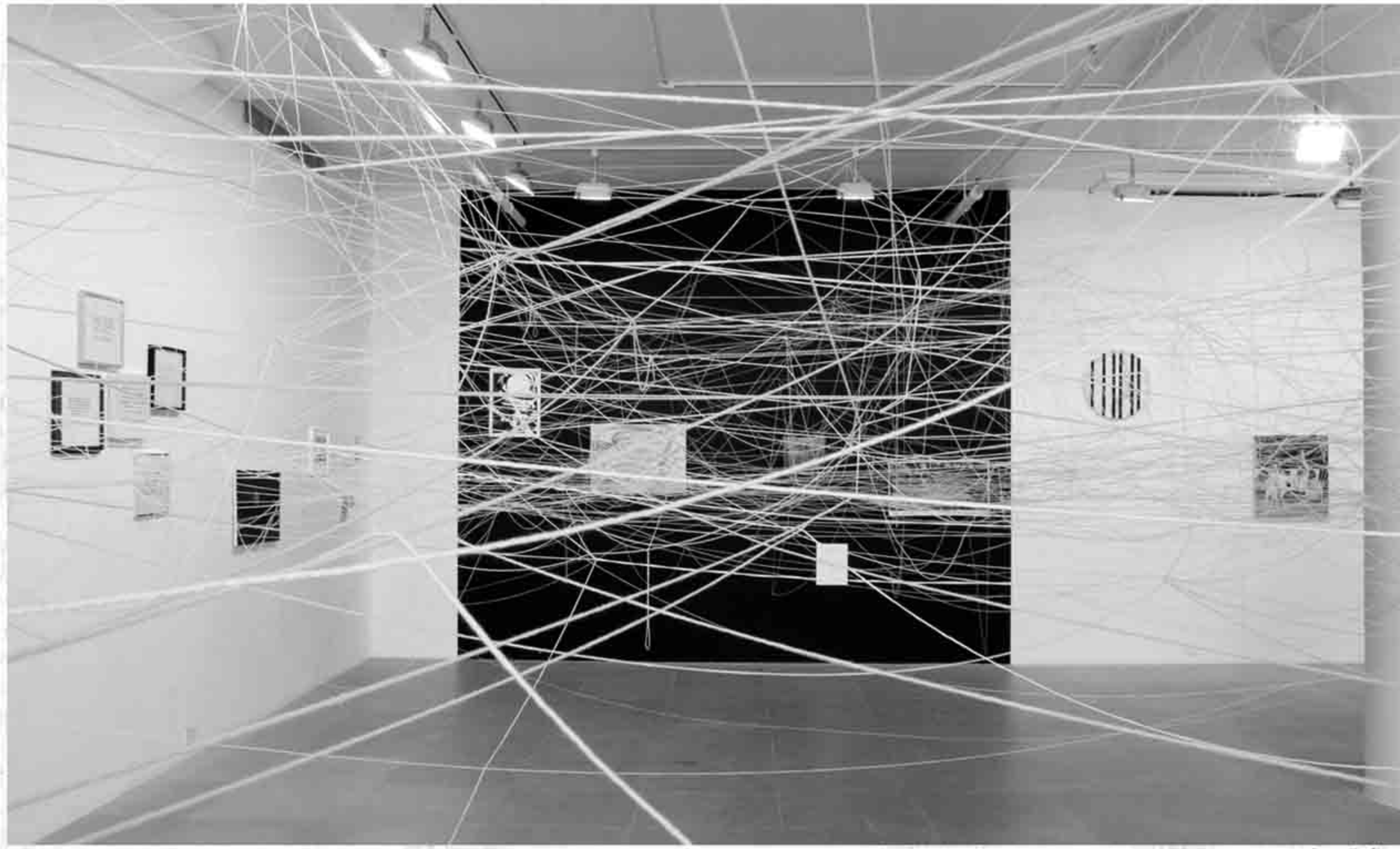


GREENE NAFTALI

The New York Times



Josh Smith's string installation, in tribute to Marcel Duchamp, in "Genesis, I'm Sorry" at Greene Naftali. Sam Pulitzer

Art in Review

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Genesis, I'm Sorry

Greene Naftali
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Aug. 10

"Genesis, I'm Sorry" is a group show in flux. Since opening, it has been the site of dance performances and a concert by the No-Neck Blues Band. Artworks have been added and subtracted. And last week, the coup de grâce: works by at least 45 artists were added to the show's original dozen, and the space was strung with a web of white twine. This final transformation was orchestrated by the painter Josh Smith in tribute to one of modern art's most famous exhibitions, the 1942 "First Papers of Surrealism" in New York, which Marcel Duchamp turned into a supersize cat's cradle with a piece called "Mile of String."

The famous photograph of this webbed installation is persistently startling, so it is no surprise that a version of the real thing is deeply weird and disorienting — especially as Mr. Smith seems to have doubled the amount of string. The space is navigable, empty yet almost full, and very spatial. Every molecule seems linked, and the act of looking is stretched and splintered in all directions at once.

The art on the walls is visible, as if through some kind of weather or natural vegetation. Getting close enough to see the works — mostly small paintings and works on paper — requires much stooping, lifting, stepping over and tacking this way and that. In other words, it is a kind of test. The string renders literal both the challenging nature of art and the fear of not being able to meet the challenge, and so remaining cut off from aesthetic experience.

The selection of works, made by the artists themselves, is wildly varied. A slacker abstraction by Michael Saint John hangs near a still life by Anne Craven. Megan Lang's tough little circular canvas (five black stripes on white) looks down on Tiffany Pollock's painting of lounging teenagers, one examining the back of her thigh. One of David Scher's fine-lined drawings hangs next to a messy abstraction said to be by Mr. Smith's godson (if so, greatly influenced by his godfather).

Sam Pulitzer's shadowy but precise collage is one of the show's finds, as is Rebecca Rainey's lavishly embroidered fur sphere and Kerstin Brätsch's handmade but infinitely reproducible book of fruit and vegetable images. Nearby, Jackie Saccaccio contributes two uncharacteristically compact and vibrant abstract paintings, while the art historian Bettina Funke exhibits a photograph of the original "Mile of String" installation and a copy of Mr. Smith's

e-mail message inviting artists to be in the show.

In the two galleries without string, work from the original exhibition is on view: beautiful, nearly abstract color photographs by Patterson Beckwith; slightly squeamish-making ones by Rudolf Schwarzkogler; and a particularly subtle (color-wise) example of Gedi Sibony's formalist recyclings. But the real star in this area is the riveting nine-minute video by the German painter and musician Kai Althoff, titled "Kolten Flynn's," which adds to his list of skills dancing, miming and just making extraordinary faces and gestures.

ROBERTA SMITH