

fall preview ||| ART



Alex Katz's "Black Tree" is among his works in "Virtual Reality," a retrospective at Richard Gray Gallery.

Much to behold

No blockbusters, but small exhibitions promise large returns

BY KYLE MACMILLAN

A decade or two ago, almost no one had heard of Artemisia Gentileschi. But the 17th century painter, who has since been the subject of novels and a controversial 1997 film, has become something of a cultural sensation and feminist icon, and her fame among the general public may now even eclipse some of her once better-known male contemporaries.

The Art Institute of Chicago is celebrating this rediscovered art star Oct. 17-Jan. 9 with a compact, two-gallery exhibition focused on one of her greatest masterpieces on loan from the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy: "Judith Slaying Holofernes" (ca. 1620).

Does the quality of Gentileschi's art live up to the recent hype surrounding her? "That's a question that will be debated a lot, but certainly this picture does," said

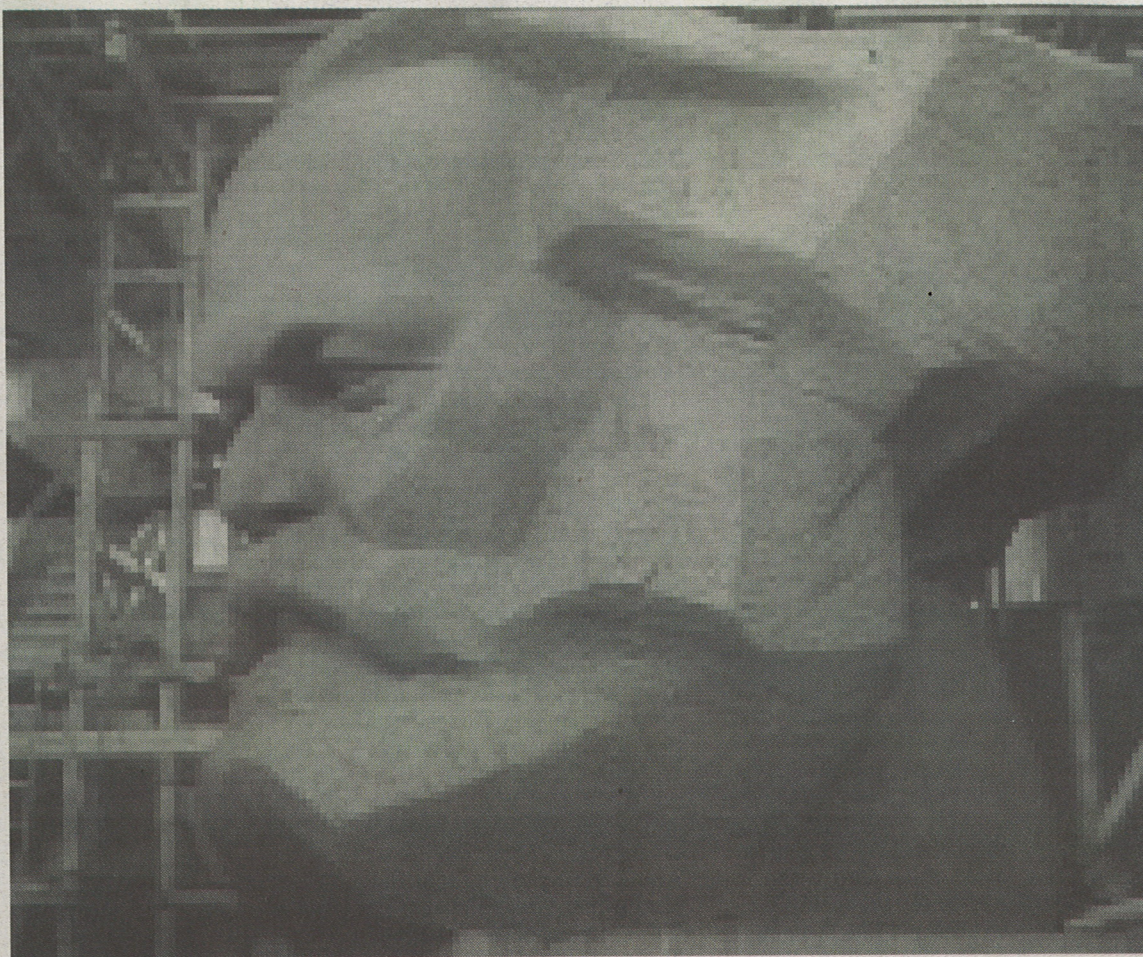
Martha Wolff, the Art Institute's curator of European painting and sculpture before 1750.

"This is her most or one of her most extraordinary and riveting pictures."

Also on view will be a dozen or so paintings and works on paper from the Art Institute's collection by artists such as Lucas Cranach and Jan Sanders van Hemessen that also depict Judith and this biblical scene. They are meant to provide context and show just how dramatic and distinctive Gentileschi's take was.

Given the rarity of the artist's works in the United States, the public's continuing fascination with her and the lack of a high-profile blockbuster this season, this little exhibition has all the makings of a sleeper hit. (For more information: 312-443-3600; artic.edu.)

Here's a look at some other noteworthy visual arts events this fall:



Deimantas Narkevicius' "The Head" (2007) is featured in "The Way of the Shovel: Art as Archaeology" at the Museum of Contemporary Art. | IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

◆ Sept. 6-Oct. 8, "Bill Traylor: Re-Discovering Genius," Carl Hammer Gallery. Traylor's bold, inventive works earned him fame as not only one of this country's top folk artists but a significant 20th century artist, period. This is the Hammer Gallery's first solo exhibition of his work since 1997. (312-266-8512; hammergallery.com)

◆ Sept. 17-Dec. 14, "Josiah McElheny: Two Clubs at the Arts Club of Chicago," Arts Club of Chicago. The 2006 MacArthur "genius grant" winner teams with Chicago architect John Vinci for a pair of installations, including a modernist-styled glass room. (312-787-3997; artsclubchicago.org)

◆ Sept. 19-22, Expo Chicago, Navy Pier. The high-profile contemporary art fair returns for its second year, with more than 120 galleries from around the world and a range of accompanying activities. (312-867-9220; expochicago.com)

◆ Sept. 20-Nov. 2, Alex Katz, "Vir-

tual Reality," Richard Gray Gallery. This solo exhibition will feature portraits and landscapes mostly from the last five years by the pop-influenced painter, one of the still-active old masters of American art. (312-642-8877; richardgraygallery.com)

◆ Sept. 21-Jan. 5, "Inventory The EAM Collection," Elmhurst Art Museum. It's an attention-grabbing if risky idea — display as many of the 600 objects as possible in the museum's eclectic collection, installing them floor to ceiling in every available space. (630-834-0202; elmhurstartmuseum.org)

◆ Sept. 29-Jan. 12, "A Study in Midwest Appropriation," Hyde Park Art Center. Curated by Michelle Grabner, this group exhibition explores a distinctive Midwestern approach to appropriation — the borrowing of imagery from other sources,

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