

# ARTFORUM

## Critics Picks

By Owen Duffy and Will Fenstermaker, November 27, 2019



Michael Wolf, *Tokyo Compression #39*, 2010, archival inkjet print, 30 x 24". From the series "Tokyo Compression," 2010.

Michael Wolf  
BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY  
529 West 20th Street Third Floor  
October 24–December 21, 2019

Michael Wolf's solo exhibition here—the first since his death this past April—is a sampling from this prolific photographer's oeuvre. Wolf, who was born in Germany but spent much of his life in China, inflected his pictures with the grandness of nineteenth-century European landscape painting while maintaining a hyperrealistic clarity synonymous with contemporary German photography. What initially come across as austere depictions of bleak modernist architecture and urban existence often break down into frank and, at various times, jarring moments of intimacy. Two photo series by Wolf, "Transparent City," 2007, and "Architecture of Density," 2003–2008—made in Chicago and Hong Kong, respectively—offer up a variety of office buildings and apartment complexes, some of which were shot from neighboring parking garages. Many a Hopperesque vignette can be viewed through their windows: of workers on conference calls, for example, or seemingly lived-in rooms devoid of people. *Manhattan Street View #2*, 2010, a work that appropriates similar kinds of vistas from Google Street View, details a pinkish structure foregrounded by the denuded branches of a tree. And *Paris Rooftops #17*, 2014, depicts the City of Light fractured like a Cubist painting. Both works seem to configure the metropolitan landscape as a site of surveillance and abstraction.

Also on display are a dozen portraits from the artist's series "Tokyo Compression," 2010, which features commuters aboard steamy and crammed subway cars. Wolf captures faces—expressionless, solemn, or lost in some private reverie—through windows thick with condensation. These pictures, awkward, tender, and often funny, inject a familiar warmth into our pallid existence.

— Will Fenstermaker



View of "Christian Nyampeta: *Ecole du soir*" (The Evening Academy), 2019.

Christian Nyampeta  
SCULPTURECENTER  
44-19 Purves Street  
September 16–December 16, 2019

The Rwandan-born artist Christian Nyampeta has been steadily propagating his scriptoria, or places for writing, across the globe. Furniture, architecture, sculptures, and paintings are incorporated into active environments for the translation of African philosophers' works. Such acts, in conjunction with the artist's constructed settings, beg an urgent question: *How do we live together?* His solidarity-minded projects have earned him greater recognition in Europe, but twenty-five years after the hideous violence of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, amid renewed debates about collectivity in the New York art world, it is high time for Nyampeta's first solo museum exhibition in the United States, "*École du soir*" (The Evening Academy).

The Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène believed cinema was a place for after-hours learning, a democratic night school for the dissemination of radical ideas. Nyampeta's extracurricular institute convenes here to translate texts by theorist Isaïe Nzeyimana, who proposes that conflict occurs only when individuals hold something in common. Nyampeta's tables and stools—in vivid tones of azure, red, and purple—are the material substrates for subtle systems of activism. And their humbleness of form is similar to the best examples of Enzo Mari's DIY Marxist furniture. Though comfort is not Nyampeta's primary goal, his use of painted MDF creates a relatively splinter-free experience. His objects and furniture become signal instances of resourcefulness.

In SculptureCenter's courtyard, visitors can rest or reflect in a steel "hosting structure," a polyformic pavilion dotted with shaped panels, replete with diagrams, images, and excerpts of the artist's own writing. Nyampeta's art creates a quiet, intellectualized setting for unity, a place that conjures the warmth of floating, momentarily, in a utopia of one's own construction.

— *Owen Duffy*

SculptureCenter