

Brownstoner

Artists and Visitors Converse With the Landscape at Olana, Storied 19th Century Fantasy Retreat



'Penetrable' by Jesús Rafael Soto

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by Susan De Vries

The landscape and the observer is the focus of an unusual exhibition showcasing the work of contemporary Brooklyn artist Teresita Fernández in a fabulous setting, Olana.

The show, “Overlook: Teresita Fernández Confronts Frederic Church at Olana,” interleaves works on the topic: Olana itself, the lush landscape and exuberantly patterned 19th century house in Hudson, N.Y., that was the unique creation of Hudson River School artist Frederic Church; the historic and contemporary landscape art collection from the Colección Patricia Phelps de

Cisneros (CPPC); and 18 pieces Fernández created expressly for this installation.

Landscapes and perception are frequent themes in Fernández's work. In the exhibition, she and guest curator Sara Meadows "reexamine Frederic Church and his contemporaries' response to the cultures and landscapes experienced during their Latin American travels," as the show writeup notes.



The house at Olana

They weave more than 70 works, a mix of the contemporary and historic, throughout [Church's masterpiece of design](#) — the first floor of the 1870s house, an upstairs gallery space and within the sculpted landscape. The exhibition, which opened two weeks ago, runs through November 5.



‘Sunset: A Scene in Brazil’ by Martin Johnson Heade (1864-65) a CPPC work installed on the first floor of Olana

Many of the artworks on display from the CPPC, founded in the 1970s to increase awareness of Latin American art and culture, were the creations of traveling artists in centuries past, seeking inspiration and adventure by exploring the countries of Latin America. Most were created between 1638 and the end of the 19th century.



A detail of Church's studio on the first floor

Church, an inveterate traveller, was one such artist — he explored Latin America in the 1850s and 1860s, including trips to Ecuador and Haiti, and spent much of the late 19th century wintering in Mexico. The interiors of Olana are richly adorned with his own work as well as art he collected.



‘View of Frederica City in Paraíba’ by Frans Post (1638) a CPPC work installed on the first floor of Olana

Fernández and Meadows used this Church link to plumb the depths of the CPPC collection and ultimately chose to install 54 works inside the house and one sculptural piece in the landscape. On the first floor of the house, the picturesque landscapes from the CPPC are mixed in amongst the Church collection — at home with the “exotic,” richly patterned interior he created.



Botanicals from the CPPC and new works by Fernández installed in the Sharp Gallery on the second floor

In the Sharp Gallery on the second floor of the house, Fernández created salon-style installations centered around three themes — botanicals, portraits and landscapes. Interspersed amongst the paintings, sketches and watercolors of previous centuries are her own drawings — all executed in graphite on wood panels.



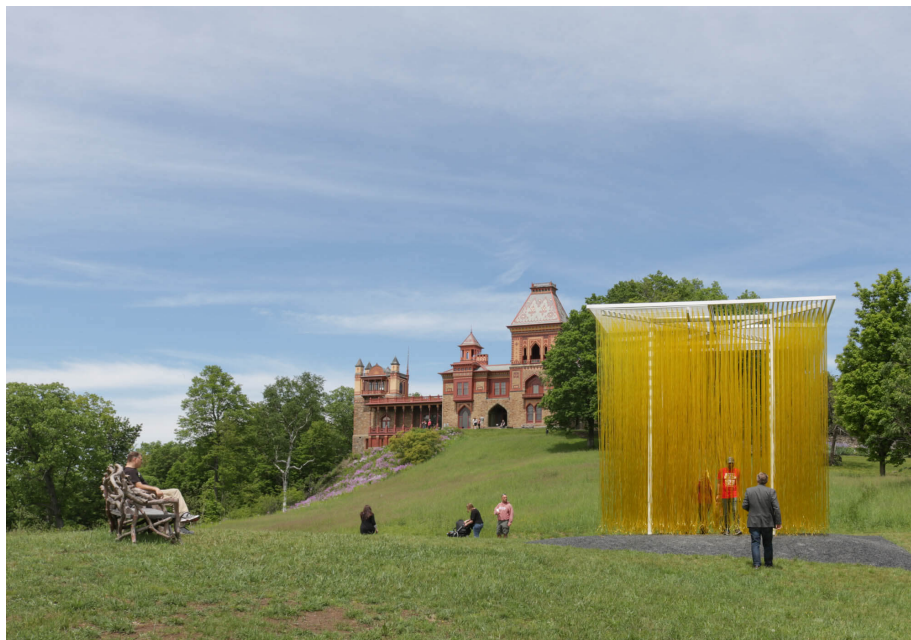
Portraits from the CPPC and new works from Fernández installed in the Sharp Gallery.

As Fernández combed through the historic work, she began to explore the notion that landscapes convey a picturesque beauty but do not allow one to learn about the people who lived there or the artist's experience in traveling through Latin America, she notes in her artist statement for the exhibition. The location of the wall of portraits is deliberate, placed directly opposite a wall of landscapes — as a viewer gazes at the landscapes, the portraits hover behind, observing the viewer.

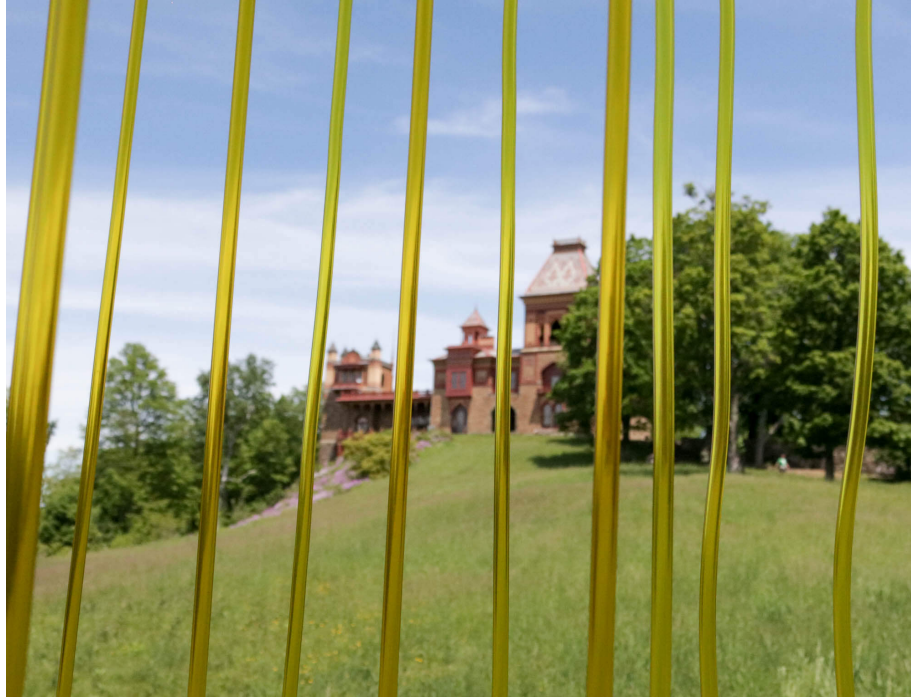


Landscapes from the CPPC and new works by Fernández installed in the Sharp Gallery

Her monochromatic, abstract and textured works offer a contrast to the idealized and often romanticized landscapes of the traveler artists.



The exploration of the role of the observer in the landscape continues outside with Jesús Rafael Soto's 'Penetrable.' In Soto's oversized sculptural work, yellow tubes flow down from a square steel frame.



Soto's 1990 piece is interactive and kinetic. Viewers are invited to become participants, stepping inside and altering both their viewpoints of the outside world and others' view of them.



Sited within view of the house and overlooking the Hudson, the location of Soto's sculpture is not accidental. The spot was chosen based on an 1886 site plan drawn by Church that shows a small structure there labeled "summer house." Whether it was ever built is unknown, but it does suggest Church considered making his own artistic statement on the spot.



'Penetrable' has been installed around the world, but normally inside the confines of a museum or gallery. Here at Olana it is open to the elements — the shifting winds gently ruffling the yellow tubing, the changing light altering the yellow from soft to vibrant and visitors moving in and around the work. (Interaction is encouraged, but using it as a swing or climbing rope is not).



How to Visit

Address: 5720 Route 9G, Hudson, N.Y.

Hours: The grounds at Olana are open daily, 8 a.m. to sunset, year-round. The works on the interior of the house can be seen by guided or self-guided tour — tickets are required for all interior visits and they sell out quickly. For more information, click [here](#).

Admission: Free access to the grounds; house tours are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and students, children under 12 free.

Directions: Take Amtrak to Hudson, then a taxi (about a 10-minute ride). By car, Olana is about 2.5 hours from Brooklyn via the Taconic State Parkway.



[Photos by Susan De Vries]