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Upstairs Gallery: *Made in Philly*

David Aipperspach, Mark Thomas Gibson, Leroy Johnson, Aubrey Levinthal, Gilbert Lewis, Roberto Lugo, Sarah McEneaney, Bethann Parker, Leigh Werrell, Didier William, Nasir Young, and Allen Yu

November 6, 2025 – January 10, 2026

Uffner & Liu is pleased to present the group show *Made in Philly*. Though not intended to be comprehensive, this exhibition brings together artists who share a deep connection to Philadelphia. Some are prominent educators and community leaders; others portray the city in poetic and poignant ways. A distinctive, often idiosyncratic—and at times folky—sensitivity runs through many of the works: at once fiercely independent and profoundly community-minded.

As a contemporary art dealer with personal ties to Philadelphia—though still very much an outsider—the show reflects my own artistic inclinations while attempting the impossible: to begin to grasp the depth and richness of the city's supportive arts community. With new institutions like Calder Gardens opening just weeks ago, Philadelphia is becoming increasingly intriguing, though it remains underexplored by many. Like every major city—or perhaps every place—its artistic ecosystem is shaped by unique cultural influences and infrastructural realities. Its proximity to New York City also plays a role, with many of the artists regularly traveling there to view exhibitions and maintain gallery relationships.

The show spans a wide range of voices—from posthumously exhibited work to that of emerging artists. Nearly all participants studied at Philadelphia art schools—institutions now facing significant challenges, including closures and job losses at the University of the Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA).

Gilbert Lewis (1945–2023) moved to Philadelphia in 1963 to study at PAFA. Over five decades, Lewis documented Philly's gay male community—portraying both youth and aging—and created sensitive portraits while conducting art therapy at a nursing home.

Leroy Johnson (1937–2022), a mixed-media artist, often used materials gathered on daily commutes to his jobs as a social worker, rehabilitation counselor, and teacher of disabled youth. His work reflects the layered architecture and people of Philadelphia.

Sarah McEneaney, born in Germany and a 1979 PAFA graduate, has made Philadelphia her lifelong home. Known for her autobiographical paintings and deep community involvement, her presence remains a cornerstone of the local art scene.

Roberto Lugo, a Puerto Rican American potter, educator, and social activist, creates work that bridges historic craft traditions with contemporary issues of race, identity, and class. Lugo frequently engages in public speaking and community work, often drawing on his upbringing in the Kensington section of Philadelphia.

Didier William, a Haitian-American artist, moved to Philadelphia to chair the M.F.A. program at PAFA. His richly layered works—incorporating carving, collage, painting, and

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printmaking—navigate immigration, familial history, folklore, and present-day socio-political concerns.

Allen Yu works at one of the two Philadelphia-based Center for Creative Works locations, a studio and professional development space for neurodiverse artists. His contributions reflect the city's commitment to inclusivity in creative spaces.

Aubrey Levinthal, a Philadelphia native and graduate of both Penn State and PAFA, is deeply integrated into the city's artistic community. Her paintings, rooted in daily life, capture the subtle textures and humor of the Philadelphia landscape.

Mark Thomas Gibson, a more recent transplant to Philadelphia, brings a powerful voice to the scene. His work, shaped by American history, art history, and contemporary issues of race, identity, and politics, speaks urgently to our moment.

David Aipperspach offers a thoughtful, intimate approach to painting, contributing to the broader dialogue of contemporary art in Philadelphia.

Bethann Parker, currently living as a homesteader in the Appalachian Mountains, received her artistic training in Philadelphia and maintains strong ties to the city's creative legacy.

Leigh Werrell creates intricately narrative works rooted in a folk-inspired visual language, reflecting a personal yet communal sensibility shaped by Philadelphia.

Nasir Young, a rising voice in the local art scene, brings a fresh, energetic perspective grounded in everyday life in the city.

Special thanks to Aubrey Levinthal, Olivia Jia, Anne Buckwalter, Alex Baker (Fleisher/ Ollman Gallery), and Samantha Mitchell (Center for Creative Works) for their own invaluable work and generous recommendations throughout the development of this exhibition.

– Rachel Uffner

Image: Mark Thomas Gibson, *Weathering the Storm*, 2024, ink on canvas, 55 7/8 x 77 1/2 in (141.9 x 196.8 cm)

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