

Petzel

Paul Laster, "8 Must-See Solo Gallery Shows in October" *Galerie*, October 2, 2026.

Galerie

ART & CULTURE

8 Must-See Solo Gallery Shows in October

From Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's surreal, symbolic drawings and sculptural paper installations to Keith Sonnier's early experiments with neon and argon for his innovative light sculptures

BY PAUL LASTER
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Emily Mae Smith, *The Changeling*, (2026).
PHOTO: JASON MANDELLA. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL

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Rounding up the best gallery exhibitions across the United States each month, *Galerie* journeyed from New York and Chicago to Los Angeles to highlight the top solo shows for October. From Sandra Vásquez de la Horra’s surreal, symbolic drawings and sculptural paper installations at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York and Clotilde Jiménez’s layered mixed-media collages exploring his personal experiences and complex family history at Marianne Ibrahim in Chicago to Keith Sonnier’s early experiments with neon and argon for his innovative light sculptures at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles, these are the not-to-be-missed shows this month.

5. Emily Mae Smith | Petzel, New York

Emily Mae Smith is an American artist known for her distinctive narrative oil paintings that blend a polished, cartoon-like style with pointed feminist critique, using symbols and signs to challenge the traditionally male-centric stories of art history. Smith creates vibrant, humorous, and occasionally disturbing works that draw heavily on classic art styles such as Symbolism, Surrealism, Art Nouveau, and Pop. Her paintings employ visual illusions, dark humor, and anthropomorphism—key elements of René Magritte’s surrealist style—and were showcased alongside his in the 2024 “Emily Mae Smith x René Magritte” exhibition at the Magritte Museum in Brussels. Like Magritte’s pipes or bowler hats, Smith distorts familiar objects to challenge their conventional meanings.

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In her second solo exhibition with the gallery, “Transit of Venus,” the New York-based artist’s hybrid figures and symbolic objects—including her anthropomorphic broomstick, grapes, eyeballs, and open-mouthed frames—undergo further transformations, evolving into forms that blend human, animal, and plant characteristics. These new forms resemble tricksters in their instability, resisting fixed identities and simple labels. The characters function more as propositions than as metaphors—questioning the links between labor, class, and gender, not only through historical norms but also within today’s social and political landscape. Smith’s new paintings, including *The Changeling*, directly address the present moment, emphasizing that living with dignity is increasingly challenging and highlighting the importance of connection to others and the natural world for survival.

Through October 24

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