

Evan Moffitt, "The Must-See Exhibitions in New York This Autumn," *Frieze*, September 13, 2019.

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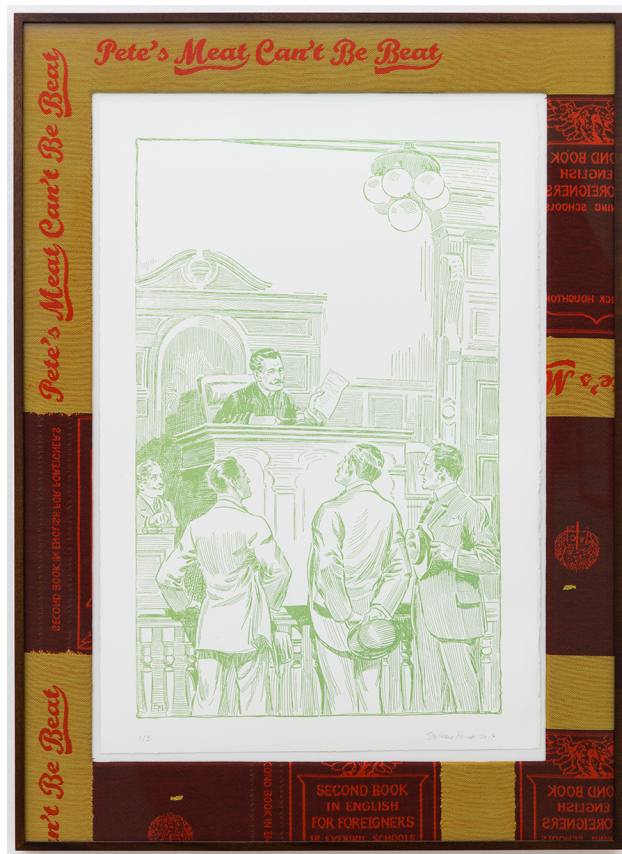
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The Must-See Exhibitions in New York This Autumn

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BY EVAN MOFFITT
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As galleries return from summer break with a full slate of programming, here are the best shows in town



Stephen Prina, *English for Foreigners: Frontispiece*, 2017, lithography on paper, textile covered matt, mahogany and glass, 79.4 x 57.8 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel, New York

Stephen Prina, 'English for Foreigners (abridged)'

Petzel

12 September – 26 October

The core of Stephen Prina's exhibition at Petzel on 67th Street is a book without words. 'English for Foreigners (abridged)' (2017), the titular series of lithographs, assembles the illustrations from an eponymous 1917 book that the artist's father bought when he arrived in New York from Italy in 1923. Stripped of text, the anodyne graphics are oddly unsettling. Dick and Jane skip past picket fences; a woman tends a wood-burning oven; a group of labourers dig a ditch. Each page is set in a wide, carefully embroidered frame with the slogan of the butcher shop Prina's father owned: 'Pete's Meat Can't Be Beat.' (Pete evidently didn't get the ribald joke.) The dopey polka that plays in the gallery, *Giovinezza* (Youth, 1909) scored for clarinet, was the anthem of the Italian Fascist Party, which Prina's father, a clarinetist, conscientiously refused to play. (The brown and red upholstery that bears the slogan recalls the uniforms of Adolf Hitler's

Petzel

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Sturmabteilung.) The pairing winks at homosexuality's long, fraught flirtation with fascism and the phallic instrument Prina's father *did* beat; but it's also a wry perversion of anti-immigrant, Anglo-American masculinity and prurience. There are familiar locations included in the lithographs: the old NYPD headquarters on Centre Street; the municipal courts further downtown. Cops and judges turn this innocent guidebook into a prep course for a life of disenfranchisement in the US judicial system. Such paternalism is an unhappy correlative to the xenophobia we've apparently never gotten over. Let's hope that in 2020 we can finally beat it.

<https://frieze.com/article/must-see-exhibitions-new-york-autumn>