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## Lloyd Foster: *Height and Soil*

By Maggley Vielot



Installation view: *Lloyd Foster: Height and Soil*, Long Gallery Harlem, New York, 2025–26. Courtesy Long Gallery Harlem. Photo: Andrew Godreaux.

When I think of Harlem, I think of Toni Morrison’s declaration: “I stood at the border, stood at the edge, and claimed it as central ... and let the rest of the world move over to where I was.” Despite marginalization, Harlem has long been, and continues to be, an epicenter of Black American culture, a neighborhood defined by its storied past and its enduring cultural influence. In anticipation of the Studio Museum’s reopening after seven years, Long Gallery Harlem’s Art of the Window exhibition series emerged as an assertion of the neighborhood’s role as an incubator and champion of Black art.

The final iteration of the series, Lloyd Foster’s *Height and Soil*, curated by Destiny Gray, transforms the gallery window into both a portal and mirror. Installed at street level, Foster’s work celebrates the local community. He meticulously documented Harlem residents during the African American Day Parade, in addition to neighborhood landmarks. These photographs were then transformed into sculptures that solidify moments, memories, and feelings, giving them physical weight. The installation becomes both a portrait and love letter, a meditation on what Harlem offers its residents and visitors. Accompanying the photo-sculptures is a short video detailing the precise moments which revealed themselves as photographs—people, street signs, and buildings are selectively framed and zoomed in on, each a deliberate act of immortalization.

*Height and Soil*  
Long Gallery Harlem  
November 9, 2025–January  
18, 2026  
New York



Lloyd Foster, *Height and Soil* (detail), 2025. Courtesy Long Gallery Harlem. Photo: Andrew Godreaux.

The installation unfolds as a suspended constellation, with styrofoam carvings of Foster’s photographs and painted figures staggered at varying heights, swaying gently from the ceiling. The work compels viewers to move, to shift perspective, and to look closely. The sculptures bear the marks of their making: rough edges, splashes of paint, and the visible trace of Foster’s hand. These imperfections feel conscious; they assert not only Foster’s presence but the presence of his subjects as well, parade participants and neighborhood residents whose images are returned to the community as monuments. What began as ephemeral street encounters becomes permanent, dignified, and displayed.

Foster’s choice of materials further emphasizes his expansive vision. Styrofoam is lightweight and accessible—it resists preciousness. In Foster’s hands it is transformed into vessels of memory and meaning. The roughness of the carvings, their hand-worked surfaces, refuses the polish of the institution. This aesthetic choice mirrors the work’s conceptual project, elevating the everyday without erasing its texture, its grit, and its authenticity.

The visual narrative Foster constructs is captivating. Tender moments between friends and families are crystalized, a reminder that Harlem’s essence lies in its people. Foster honors the everyday: someone getting their hair braided, a smiling chef, T-shirts displayed in a gift store, the awning of a deli. Interwoven are scenes emblematic of Harlem as a place—a street sign at 124th and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, the Harlem Market sign, Faith Ringgold’s rendering of Marian Anderson at the 125th Street Station. Foster captures not just presence but style, the neighborhood’s unmistakable swagger: dapper elders; a family in their Sunday best; a motorcyclist adorned in red, black, and green, his helmet and bandana bearing Black Panther Party insignia. Each figure is a distillation of Harlem’s spirit. The installation doesn’t extract Harlem for display; it reflects what’s here.



Lloyd Foster, *Height and Soil* (detail), 2025. Courtesy Long Gallery Harlem. Photo: Andrew Godreaux.

*Height and Soil* echoes Lorraine O’Grady’s *Art Is...* (1983/2009)—currently on view around the corner at the Studio Museum—in its insistence that the marginal and the mundane are worthy subjects for art. O’Grady brought gilded frames to the African American Day Parade, transforming participants into art and asserting that Blackness and the avant-garde are not contradictory. Her work declared that Black people are not merely subjects but makers, not only audiences but also artists. Foster’s installation operates similarly. By foregrounding everyday Harlem residents in a street-level window display, Foster’s work is constantly moved through public emergence. The street gallery refuses the traditional exclusion of much contemporary art. What emerges is both documentation and celebration, a practice rooted not in gatekeeping but in community recognition.

The window installation allows for *Height and Soil* to meet people in the rhythm of their daily lives. It exists where Harlem exists. Foster creates a circuit where Harlem residents see themselves elevated and monumentalized in the very streets they animate. The work refuses the logic of an art world that maintains barriers of entry and excludes those living in the margins. In this, *Height and Soil* doesn’t just document Harlem, it affirms that Harlem has always been, as Morrison knew, central.

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