

The New York Times

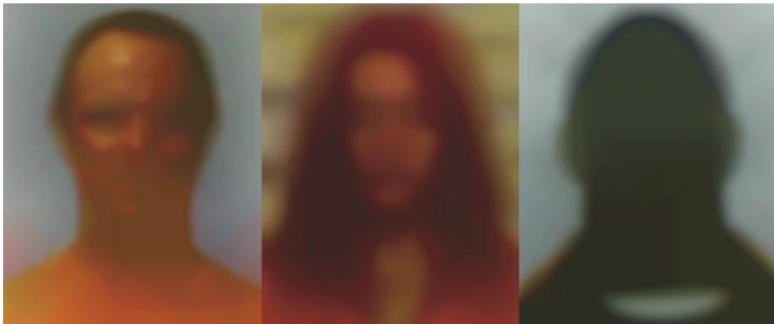
ART REVIEWS

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Pierre Soulages's astonishing black monochromes; Alma Thomas's vibrant abstractions; Elaine Cameron-Weir's sculptures; and photographing 'the criminal type.'

'The Criminal Type'

Through Nov. 16. Apexart, 291 Church Street, Manhattan; 212-431-5270, apexart.org.



For his "Obscurity" project, from 2016, Paolo Cirio blurred images found on mug-shot websites and scrambled the associated data. via apexart

There's one particularly remarkable picture in "[The Criminal Type](#)." Taken by the social documentary photographer Jacob Riis around 1895, it shows a [bearded man being restrained](#) by four men in suits, while a fifth looks on. The overseer is [Thomas Byrnes](#), New York City's chief of detectives who implemented the process of photographing not just convicted criminals but suspects as well. The ragged character who struggles in the frame doesn't want to have his picture taken.

Even in the 19th century, that man knew: Photography is not simply an objective tool but a mechanism of control. This small but important exhibition examines how those in power have long used the medium to decide who looks like a criminal, and how such determinations have often been bound up with prejudicial, pseudoscientific theories.

The curator, Elizabeth Breiner, begins with historical images and information, including what are believed to be the earliest photographs of American slaves. She then brings her inquiry into the present day with a mix of artistic, activist and journalistic work — projects like Paolo Cirio's "[Obscurity](#)" (2016), which copied, jumbled and reposted information from contemporary mug-shot websites to disrupt their dubious practices; Zora J. Murff's "[Corrections](#)" photographs (2013-15), made while tracking juveniles on probation; and a [ProPublica](#) study of risk-assessment software used in court. Together they paint a damning picture of a broken modern system built on old biases. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*