

# The New York Times

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## Art In Review: Kambui Olujimi

By Holland Cotter

Walk the Plank Gallery 138 138 West 17th Street, Chelsea Through Thursday

You're crazy if you think racism isn't still a problem in the United States, and the singer Nina Simone, who died last year, would have told you so. Civil-rights-era veteran, expatriate, furious to the end, she might have said something like: it's all still there, just a little subtler, a little slicker, platinum-card plated.

Kambui Olujimi's first one-man show is dedicated to Ms. Simone and touches on subjects she would have understood. One piece is about the "brown-bag test," once a popular method for determining social exclusion by gradations in skin color. Another simulates an all-promise, no-win national lottery. A third uses the form of the gold nameplate, a status symbol for young African-Americans, to spell out the phrase "Always Bet on Black." The piece is part of a series titled "For Peaches," referring to the militant character in the Simone song "Four Women," but here, as throughout the show, the reference to race is ambiguous. Racism is seen as aggressive and reflexive: white on black, black on white, black on black.

Mr. Olujimi has done strong work as a poet, a curator and recently as an artist-collaborator with Hank Willis Thomas in the video animation "Winter in America." His solo show is carefully made and filled with good ideas, some of which come across better than others. He's still in his 20's and trying things out. It may say something about the direction he's going that the most effective piece is a non collaborative video, "Heartaches and Toothaches," a short, harsh, dream-story of innocence consumed by experience, set to the sound of Ms. Simone singing "House of the Rising Sun."