

# GALERIE LELONG

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**The New York Times**

**January 12, 2017**

**by Martha Schwendener**

## What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



"Blue Skies Matter" (2016), created by Samuel Levi Jones from Ohio statute books on canvas. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York

SAMUEL LEVI JONES

*Through Jan. 28. Galerie Lelong, 528 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-315-0470, [galerielelong.com](http://galerielelong.com).*

From a distance, the paintings in Samuel Levi Jones's exhibition "Burning All Illusion," at Galerie Lelong, resemble sedate geometric abstractions, structured around the traditional artist's grid. Step closer, however, and you see it's not paint on the surface, but book covers ripped from their sources and arranged, quiltlike, on the canvas. Step even closer and you can make out a few titles, although most have been removed: "Reference Library of Black America: Volume II"; "Race and Ethnicity in the United States"; "West's Illinois Digest" volumes on homicide or assault.

The book covers came from the library of the African American Studies department at the University of California, Berkeley, which was deaccessioning obsolete items. They are, of course, very charged objects. The existence of such a library shows some kind of progress for African-Americans. Yet, seeing the torn-off covers reminds us of how differently laws have been — and still are — applied to various Americans.

Painting offers another method for considering these issues. In the same way that artists like Tomashi Jackson and Torkwase Dyson — and before them, Alma Thomas and Norman Lewis — have noted that 20th-century color theory mirrored discussions around race in this country, Mr. Jones puts pressure on concepts like truth. "Truth in Painting," to cite the Jacques Derrida tract, might be relative, and that might be O.K. The law, however, which is purportedly a search for truth and justice, and which has immediate, material consequences, has often, for many Americans, gone wildly astray.