

## ART REVIEW

# *Youth and the Market: Love at First Sight*

---

By Michael Kimmelman

March 18, 2005

THE second "Greater New York," the youth-besotted, cheerful, immodestly ingratiating jumbo survey of contemporary art, has opened to the predictable mobs at P.S. 1 in Queens. It roams from roof to basement, weaving in stairwells, a ramshackle behemoth.

The first installment, five years ago, arrived with deft timing, in competition with the 2000 Whitney Biennial. Fixed on recently emerged artists, it seemed fresh and a bit scruffy, even if it wasn't. Whitney Biennials and their equivalents, creaky relatives from a bygone age, too ecumenical and tradition-bound, increasingly supported a brand of installation art custom-made for hothouse festivals and their transient clientele but otherwise largely unwanted, unmarketable and wearying.

Then "Greater New York" happened, a messy, unformed rival and gambit, upbeat, offering multimedia efforts but with a stress toward paintings -- well-behaved, clever, snappy paintings by young artists, of the sort making some headway in galleries. These were works suited to the dawning of a new art market boom.

As an act of civic boosterism, "Greater New York" also advertised a local horde of insouciant twenty-somethings, eclectically steeped in rock, 60's revivalism, personal codes, surrealism and cartooning, among other things, and serving up dollops of blooming sophistication and charm. Skill was a big selling point: a shambling, winking sort of virtuosity, not too heavy, easy to buy into, and drawing from old art and pop culture as if interchangeably.

Five years later, in the usual way that everything even moderately successful in art is instantly institutionalized, "Greater New York" has returned bearing some of the expectations previously heaped onto the starchy biennials. As a sign of the changed times, this opening seemed intended to coincide with last weekend's blowout art fair. It is said that fairs have now become the new art festivals, but it's equally true that the big museum surveys increasingly resemble fairs.

As before, "Greater New York" is organized by a curatorial team from P.S. 1 in conjunction with its parental partner, the Museum of Modern Art. It has already prompted counterestablishment protests: a clutch of women picketed the opening, noting the 2-to-1 ratio, male to female, among the 167 artists selected.

The show peruses a scene whose wide stylistic range, persistent teenage infatuations and overall dexterousness are firmly entrenched characteristics of the marketplace. Craft and finesse are de rigueur. Descendants of Amy Sillman, Shahzia Sikander and Elizabeth Peyton perform ever-greater feats of willowy elegance. Gallerists and their client pools of hedge-fund optimists, competing for the latest hot list, troll university campuses for budding talents. Last time, there were hardly enough Chelsea galleries to go around. Now there aren't enough artists. Some of the show's wall labels, I noticed, have galleries hastily scrawled in pen, as if the artists, buoyed by their inclusion here, were suddenly snatched up in the interval between printing and pasting up the names.

The show services this giddy scene -- with its abundant gifts but, on the whole, its short-lived prospects -- while still trying to present itself as a frisky, freewheeling and independent overview.

Actually, it's a mirror of the current power structure, which isn't all bad. Some galleries are predictably favored (these included Kreps and Feature last time; now they include Feature, Team, Maccarone, Postmasters, Canada and LFL); as are a few art schools, like Columbia and Yale, from which earnest and cunning students, not even yet graduated, are emerging already branded with signature styles. There's something rather depressing about such youthful professionalism, even while it is undeniably impressive.

Meanwhile, a smattering of discoveries, some having come over the transom of an open call (more than 2,000 artists sent in their works to be considered), lightly flesh out the roster. A strain of fashionable camp and sex is notably skipped over. Carping will of course come from insiders jockeying for authority over the choices. That's the blood sport of all surveys, whose other purpose is to validate trends.

Drawing is the new painting. There's one much-promoted trend. Everybody draws so preposterously well now that it's almost boring. Degrees of nuance have multiplied -- the nuances of calculated hedonism, packaged with an occasional fillip of politics. Sincerity is also in. Depth is, however, hard to come by, which is a big source of disappointment. But then, I suppose depth is always hard to come by, depending as it does on a cultural climate more patient and skeptical, certainly, than the current one.

If I sound grudging it's partly because it is impossible not to feel implicated in the vast apparatus of this bullish market, from which the show, and hence its coverage, whether good or bad, cannot escape. No reasonable art lover resents good artists and dealers making a

buck, of course. But to imply that the embrace of youth is a virtue in itself seems a bit craven and the survey's purview, reiterating marketplace emergence as a standard of value, is in many ways comically solipsistic and narrow. This is only to state the obvious and to sound like a spoilsport.

So let me move on to the relative pleasures at hand, which include Aida Ruilova's percussive video loop, one of her syncopated sorts of mad chants, just 20 seconds long, and also Dana Schutz's "Presentation," a big, dark-witted, strangely peopled panorama of sour colors and ham-fisted panache, vaguely reminiscent of Ensor, making a case for her painterly ambitions.

In a show full of drawings, Dominic McGill's humongous walk-in scroll is at least unavoidable, a kind of finicky, sinister timeline of half a century's global plots and catastrophes, ending, like a children's book illustration, in a black forest of spiders and smoke. There are other feats of sheer industry. Yuken Teruya's cut-out shopping bags (Tiffany's, McDonald's) with tiny paper trees are nothing short of miraculous, playing on nature versus commerce, while Tobias Putrih's sculptures, made of layers of corrugated cardboard, which turn transparent when seen against the light, have an architectural magnificence.

There are various trendlets running through the show. Henry Darger meets the Little Prince. Dystopian nature. Gaudy America. Music: David Ellis's "Granny (Drum Painting Project, Version 5.0)" is a Rube Goldbergian machine, in the vein of Tim Hawkinson's oddball contraptions, incorporating gourds, subway tokens, bells, paint cans, record turntables and various animal hides, all of which are almost too neatly put together but work nonetheless. It is the elaborate yin to David Moreno's yang: "Stereomo," two simple speakers on slender poles that slowly rock back and forth to minimalist music.

Mining late modernism is an area of wide currency, encompassing Karyn Olivier's trompe l'oeil construction of a cheaply ornate coffee table supporting a plain white pillar, and Marco Breuer's drawings, if that's what to call them: delicately scratched sheets of photographic paper, making multicolored stripes. Ann Pibal's small striped paintings, à la Jo Baer, also fit this broad category; as does Corey McCorkle's circular hole cut into a wall, letting light into a dark room, a riff on James Turrell; and so does Banks Violette's Goth-inflected shiny black stage with strip lights, which reflect as a kind of Frank Stella stripe painting, or like a Gerhard Richter mirror, in a facing black panel.

I don't grasp why there's so much buzz about some of what's here, like Jen DeNike's dual track video of frolicking teenage boys or David Opdyke's intricate sculpture of a miniaturized aircraft carrier cum shopping mall or Paul Chan's double-sided computer

animation. And Justin Faunce's meticulous, kaleidoscopic painting, owing in style to Lari Pittman, and lightly dosed with social politics, seems unexceptional in its fastidiousness.

I suspect that artists like Gedi Sibony, whose arrangement of junk seems to aspire to Richard Tuttle's fine-tuned work but falls flat, aren't well-served by group samplers, which can distort and often reveal nothing about an artist. Surveys amplify extremes best: what's catchiest, loudest, simplest, biggest or, sometimes perversely, smallest.

For which reason I inevitably lingered over trifles like Oliver Michaels's video made with a camera strapped to a swiftly moving toy train whose tracks amble in and out of a building. And Kate Gilmore's video gag of extracting herself from a cement leg cast. And Shannon Plumb's jittery silent film versions of television commercials. And also Christian Jankowski's much more elaborate, noirish effort, a brief film of an artist's 16-millimeter film being screened before a crumbling office tower, the mood over the top, the message oblique.

I mean oblique as praise. Much new art seems tightly packaged, ready-made for the market. The attraction of artists like Wade Guyton or Seth Price or Guy Ben-Ner or Carol Bove has something to do with their resistance to easy absorption. Ms. Bove's arrangement of 60's paperbacks and photos on shelves is a conceptual twist on still life, and her curtain of tiny beads is both laborious and delicate, shifting with the light through a nearby window and flirting with your inattention.

It's good, in this context, to find a selection of Steve Mumford's painted dispatches from Iraq, plainspoken journalistic pictures of a throwback kind. They announce a mature artist looking closely at what is urgently unfolding around him. Their traditional sobriety stands out in a show that, like the burbling young art world now, seems gladly co-opted and almost too able to please.

"Greater New York 2005" remains at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th Avenue, Long Island City, Queens, (718)784-2084, through Sept. 26.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section E, Page 37 of the National edition with the headline: ART REVIEW; Youth and the Market: Love at First Sight