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MOMA THE KID

by Walter Robinson



A view of Liz Magic Laser's *Mine* (2009), in P.S.1's "Greater New York"

At the press preview for "Greater New York," Apr. 23-Oct. 18, 2010, the mildly anticipated survey of new art that fills all four floors of P.S.1 in Long Island City, curator Connie Butler hazarded that the show of works by 67 artists "reflects our time. . . has a political undercurrent. . . and displays a personal iconography and emotionality," or words to that effect.

Co-curator Klaus Biesenbach -- the exhibition's third overseer, Neville Wakefield, was unavoidably absent for personal reasons -- said that the curators had tried to avoid making "Greater" into "just another big young-artist group show" (sorry, no luck there). And then, oddly, he wondered how such shows are significantly different from art fairs.

The sad truth is that curators lost this battle some time ago, but as if to answer his own question, Biesenbach noted that P.S. 1 had not much money, but a lot of space. "We hoped the artists would move in and take it over," Butler had said. "We feel like that's really happened."

A quick verdict: The show is modest but good, with quirky, in-your-face, curious and thoughtful works, but "Greater New York" hardly makes the Museum of Modern Art into the new contemporary-art kingmaker.

Some idle observations (my specialty):

* The best work in the show is the goldfish tank containing two Koi, with small reproductions of a pair of Renaissance portraits attached to the back wall, as if to say that

we began as fish and ended up in the Renaissance. Humanism rules!

The fish are great -- they respond to the viewer and even look out of the tank right at you, for a little bit of real life "direct address." The Koi are presumably searching for food, so the work has the distinction of finally providing an answer to W.J.T. Mitchell's goofy question, "What do pictures want?" They want something to eat, of course. The sculpture is by Tommy Hartung, who shows at On Stellar Rays on Orchard Street (as do several other artists in the show).

* Sexual transgression is a subject of interest for a number of artists, including A.L. Steiner, Leigh Ledare and Maria Petschnig, making the show as a whole rather strangely reminiscent of Eric Fischl's kinky Neo-Expressionist paintings from the 1980s.

* In a room of paintings by Leidy Churchman, depicting hardcore gay lumberjack sex, is a table holding several small sculptures, including a Paul McCarthy-like bust of a mariner and a hand-made dildo, adding still another answer to the eternal painter's question, what the hell is sculpture good for? (It's something you can stick up your ass.)

* The show's faint nod to the glib Duchampian gesture comes via Bruce High Quality Foundation, which has filled a rather spacious gallery with a variety of new white sculpture pedestals, which are to be exchanged during the course of the show for used ones, presumably bearing the traces of artistic efforts by New York art students.

* The show's juvenilia includes a small gallery whose floor is covered with a layer of baseball bats, courtesy of David Adamo. It's called *The Rite of Spring*. Perhaps MoMA wishes that Carl Andre paid more attention to his father, who was a woodworker?

* Liz Magic Laser -- now that's a name -- presents a video that shows a \$20 bill, among other objects, being cut into pieces by something called the Da Vinci Surgical System, a spectacle that at least one working man in the room found painful. The vitrine is right there, filled with singles as well as pieces of the \$20.

* The New York-based conceptual artist Adam Pendleton has a 20-minute-long musical audiotape in the show, with himself on vocals, titled *Abolition of Alienated Labor*.

* Two painters-to-watch, in the modest Luc Tuymans-Elizabeth Peyton school at least, are Caleb Considine, whose 28 x 32 in. *Untitled* oil shows two toes spread for fungus inspection, and Alisha Kerlin, whose paintings of cards laid out for *Solitaire* games are all too perfectly allegorical.

* For revolutionaries, hidden away by the P.S.1 third floor staff offices is a chart, courtesy something called the Institute for Applied Autonomy, that shows what purport to be the *Routes of Least Surveillance* around Manhattan island, the sort of thing that any terrorist (or revolutionary) would love to get a hold of. Someone should really call the *New York Post* and get "Greater New York" some publicity.