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Greater New York 2010

P.S.1. CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER, NEW YORK, USA



'Greater New York 2010' presents the work of 68 artists and collectives who have been active in the five boroughs of New York over the last five years. Curated by Klaus Biesenbach, Connie Butler and Neville Wakefield, the exhibition runs the length, breadth, floors, walls, ceilings and cafeteria of the museum. Arriving hard on the heels of the Whitney Biennial and last year's 'Generational: Younger Than Jesus' at the New Museum, its task is to identify paths through the as-yet-unwritten terrain of New York now. Needless to say, we are not in the grip of a paradigm shift. There are familiar trails that flag perennial if not current moods: ethnographic identity politics meet hangover radicalism, painterly post-Minimalism shares the walls with photographic portraiture, and sexuality via the dressing-up box, served with some obligatory outré moments – courtesy of an artist who photographs his mother in flagrante delicto.

Heaven forbid that my tastes have become more refined with age, but, given the sheer volume here, there is less to like than should be expected. It is perhaps best to approach 'Greater New York 2010' like a graduation show, finding succour where you can. If you can separate them from the beaten tracks of curatorial narrative, there are works here that sustain prolonged viewing or, failing that, irk enough to prompt a response.

Many contributions signpost their critical intent. Take, for example, *Laberintos* (after octavio paz) (2003–9), William Cordova's collection of 200 vinyl records 'appropriated' from an undisclosed Ivy League college, which are presented in symbolic 'redress' for the institution's refusal to return Peruvian artefacts. The idea is going somewhere – Jean Genet, after all, made theft literary, political, even satirical – but unfortunately this feels undernourished in wit, presentation and purpose. Besides, wouldn't a Yale frat party – summary research reveals it be Cordova's Alma Mater – benefit from the sounds, words and soul of Otis Redding, Johnny Cash and Donna Summer? Just return them William,

it's OK, no questions will be asked! Laberintos shares space with Hank Willis Thomas' painstakingly digitally de-sloganeered advertising posters, 'Unbranded' (2010), which remind us that, yes, we're all all targets of incessant capitalism. In short: ad man you're a bad man.

Identity politics take a more curious and engaging turn in Liz Magic Laser's video of a mechanized and remote dissection of her handbag (Mine, 2009). It's an intriguing and sinister ballet, guided by unknown hands, in which two robotic claws examine and slice through the bag's contents as red lipgloss splurges and dollar bills are reduced to confetti. Mine works where the others don't, in that it allows the mind room to wander, to engage in the complicated matter of the subjective self, eschewing textbook enquiry or teacher/student relations.

In the same gallery, Brian O'Connell's (Not) Architecture for the Kunsthalle, P.S.1 2010 (2010) records its own production, as compacted Miracle-Gro Potting Mix and cement form what at first glance appear to be supporting columns to the gallery. Upon closer inspection the columns fall short of the ceiling. Inverting Robert Smithson's idea of site-specificity, they appear like plinths, claiming the building itself as a found work.

There are many moments in which potential relationships between works are quickly closed down, pieces that repeat or cancel each other out or simply aren't strong enough to compete with the narrative floating in from the adjoining room. Good examples are the vivid psychedelic images of fashion photographer David Benjamin Sherry, diluted both conceptually but, more pertinently, through competing colour, with Amy Yao's vividly painted doors-to-nowhere. The two are read as one. Yao fairs better in the adjoining room, where her brightly coloured hairpieces and painted batons (Anarchist Clowns Protesting at G8, no. 1-10, 2010) are placed next to Kalup Linzy's camp soap opera, Melody Set Me Free (the series) (2010). Shot between 2004 and 2010, Alice O'Malley's black and white portraits of New York underground icons are unremarkable photographs and too easy to dismiss when considered in relation to K8 Hardy's Cindy Sherman-lamprooning self-portraits. Elsewhere, and plumbing a similarly playful approach to Hardy, A.L. Steiner's Angry, Articulate, Inevitable (2010), photo-documentation wallpapered from floor to ceiling, depicts queer-shtick posturing and could be viewed as a riposte to the likes of Terry Richardson as heaps of naked flesh sprawl in presumed satiric awe of an Yves Klein body painting.

Of the small number of sound works in the exhibition, two appeal. Brody Condon's die20 (2009), a 20-sided green die, of the sort used in role-playing games, rattles away in a glass cup, an off-beat click-track that provides the soundtrack for further works by the artist that deal with digital gaming culture and role-play. In one of the gallery stairwells, Darren Bader has stuck M.I.A.'s 2007 single 'Paper Planes' on repeat, with its gunshot-punctuated refrain 'All I want to do is ... and take your money.' It's a reminder of both empty pop-radicalism and M.I.A.'s recent fall from critical grace, a satirical appropriation that speaks to its context in this exhibition. Bader's work is secreted throughout P.S.1: a fake Peter Halley painting in the museum café, and elsewhere a

laptop perched on a stool, sporting a cutesy picture of a dribbling, giggling baby. Another highlight is the work of Ryan McNamara. With a title that is gloriously to the point – *Make Ryan a Dancer* (2010) – it consists of a grueling 104 days of public dance classes held in and outside P.S.1. At the end of the exhibition McNamara will present his grand finale, a multi-styled romp through each and every room of the museum. In the meantime, visitors to the museum can watch as a dance coach, clad in archetypal oversized scoop-neck T-shirt and open-tongued Nikes, puts McNamara through his paces. Moving from rudimentary hiphop through to pop-diva moves, a clearly uncomfortable McNamara attempts to mirror the fluid moves of his instructor. Though clearly awkward, the resulting spectacle is engaging, brave and makes for compulsive viewing. As each move is layered on top of the next it becomes apparent that the transitions between moves are really where the dance and its choreography take shape; how foot connects with hip connects with shoulders and ultimately the thinking part of the cerebral cortex that defines bodily rhythm. Sometimes it's mannered and occasionally it finds its grace and fluidity. It could stand as a coda for 'Greater New York 2010' as a whole.

Mark Beasley