

A View of the New York Art Scene

■ In order to get an idea of the current New York scene you need to ditch a number of fantasies and be ready to embrace others. First to go is the notion of groups or movements. Forget your memories of those ancient times when artists used to meet in very specific places to chew over artistic issues. The New York scene in 2011 is on the same measureless scale as the country itself. The only thing its artists share is the fact of being uprooted. Events like *Greater New York* at PS1, the Whitney Biennial and *Younger Than Jesus* have shown that often the action of "taking the pulse" of an emerging scene in a given geographical location just as often ends up serving notice of its imminent demise. Fortunately, New York excels at mischievously defying expectations, thanks to its mind-boggling number of galleries and institutions. The quality of the shows in Chelsea remains exemplary, and the fact that they compete in scope with museum events no longer raises eyebrows. As for the Lower East Side, for all their recent efforts, galleries there are not in the same league. Give or take a handful of brilliant exceptions (Bureau, Reena Spaulings, Laurel Gitlen), their programs are generally disappointing. Instead of doing what they could do best, and acting as laboratories, they are trying hard to be commercial. Meanwhile, attention is shifting from the Armory Show, the city's legacy fair, to the innovative Independent, a concept initiated by gallerists Elizabeth Dee and Darren Flook. At this new fair each booth is conceived in relation to the ones around it. Brooklyn has, for obvious economic reasons, become a gigantic studio where artists of the caliber of Urs Fischer live and work.

So much for geography. As to the works, it would seem that the most interesting artists of the new generation are the ones who turn market structures to their advantage, playing on the prefabricated tendencies of trend-surfing curators, artists who manage not to get put in closed and arbitrary social pigeonholes. Peter Coffin, the epitome of such free agents, delivers this very lucid view of the scene: "Some people think that New York City speaks for the whole country and that decisions as to what is important in art are determined by gallery sales. Sometimes this influence insinuates itself into institutions and rewrites the history of art. The exorbitant price of professional art studies is no help to creativity. Art students are under pressure because they've built up debts of tens of thousands of dollars just to get their diplo-

mas, so they have to produce art at any cost. New York has incredible energy when it comes to thinking about art, but what this city decides to promote is too much bound up with sales and the market. I admire an approach to art that parts of New York ignore or forget all too easily. But really there isn't just one art milieu, and there's lots left to discover."

That is why the focus of this survey is on emerging artists, but emerging in the very wide sense of the term: artists who manage to stand out from the milieu. That can mean anyone from 77 year-old Lorraine O'Grady to Jordan Wolfson, age 30. These are people whose work and methods stands apart, or people who have a distinctive way of dealing with the New York art milieu, as in the case of Christian

Holstad or Anna Craycroft. People like Nick Van Woert, Nick Mauss and Allyson Vieira who are different from the other artists trying to make it. Or Kalup Linzy, who epitomizes the return to grace of performance, a tendency fostered by Klaus Biesenbach at MoMA and Roselee Goldberg, founder of the Performa festival. As for Leigh Ledare, his photographs offer a bold new take on the question of the subject and the notion of intimacy. Finally, education, a theme much discussed by artists in recent years, is the cause championed by the Bruce High Quality Foundation group.

As may be understood from the above, the New York art scene in 2011 is a highly fragmentary one. It is an artistic universe of solitary planets where each artist here has a distinct orbit. Where battles are personal.



Penwarden, C. "A View of the New York Art Scene," art press, March 2011.

« L'art noir doit prendre plus de risques ! » C'était là un manifeste identitaire pour une époque où les femmes, et les noires en particulier, n'avaient pas le droit de citer dans le milieu de l'art. *The Black and White Show*, que Lorraine O'Grady organisa à la même époque, appela quatorze artistes blancs et quatorze artistes noirs (dont Adrian Piper, Keith Haring, Nancy Spero) à créer des œuvres uniquement en noir et blanc. Son approche conceptuelle, lorsqu'elle rapproche par exemple des portraits de sa sœur disparue et des figures antiques comme celle de Nefertiti, n'a jamais semblé aussi contemporaine.

CHRISTIAN HOLSTAD

Né en 1972 à Anaheim (Californie)

www.christianholstad.com

www.massimodecarlo.it

www.victoria-miro.com

Christian Holstad ne sépare pas sa pratique de son existence. Cet artiste américain invente constamment des personnages, des situations, se travestit lui-même : « J'emploie la même méthode que les acteurs, une facette de ma personnalité réalise ces sculptures. Mes personnages sont un véhicule pour l'art, comme les actionnistes viennois, je deviens ce que je fais. Mon travail me permet de découvrir le 1% de ma personnalité que j'ignore et que je contiens. » Lors de la dernière célébration d'Halloween, il s'est déguisé en pêcheur

which are never higher than the artist herself, keep her work away from mere copying and bring it firmly into the present. Her fragment *Obelisk*, for example, is open to all kinds of interpretations.

NICK VAN WOERT

Born 1979 in Reno (Nevada)

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www.yvon-lambert.com

Like Allyson Vieira, Nick Van Woert is interested in Antiquity, which he links to contemporary concerns. Born in Nevada, Van Woert holds a degree in architecture and is passionate about nature. He takes a close interest in ecology and in the writings of the eco-terrorist Unabomber, which he links to his fascination with Vitruvius, the early Roman architect and thinker who was himself strongly inspired by nature. Says the artist: "I firmly believe in the idea that what we are inside our body is reflected in our environment. This metaphor can be found in architecture, when you compare a building to a body."

The bodies of Van Woert's wacky sculp-

tures, which are often copies of Antique models found in the trash cans of plasters in his neighborhood of Brooklyn, give him his starting point. On these relics, these busts and legs, he pours liters of colored polyurethane glue, endowing his fragments with strange, almost baroque new forms. He often sends his sculptures to the plasterers for a final touch, and compares his mode of production to "rotating doors." Nick Van Woert has just had his first exhibition at Yvon Lambert New York.

NICK MAUSS

Born 1980 in New York

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The piece that Nick Mauss showed last year in the *Greater New York* exhibition at PS1 made a considerable impression with its elegance and powerful presence. Long ribbons in black silk, hanging from a simple, almost invisible wooden structure defined the space. The installations by this young German artist who has been living in NYC for years now (he is one of Elizabeth Peyton's favorite models) are as subtle as his drawings. Mauss first came to attention for his delicate works on paper (and his prints on aluminum sheets), in which faces or architectural perspectives

Anna Craycroft. « The Agency of the Orphan »
Mine de plomb sur papier, 125 x 120 cm. Exposition
chez Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York, 2008 (Court. de
l'artiste) Graphite on paper with embossed matte



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