

Art in Review

Brucennial 2012

159 Bleecker Street, at Thompson Street, Greenwich Village
Through April 20

What is the Brucennial? The announcement on the Web site of its organizers, the anonymous members of the Bruce High Quality Foundation and Vito Schnabel, calls it: "The single most important art exhibition in the history of the world. Ever." This impudent hyperbole leads you to wonder: Is the Brucennial 2012 (with its tag line "Harderer. Betterer. Fasterer. Strongerer.") a joke? A madcap exercise in Relational Aesthetics? An Occupy-style protest against the New York art establishment and its carefully groomed exhibitions like the Whitney Biennial and the New Museum Triennial — both on view now?

You might view the jam-packed, multifloor installation of works by close to 400 artists as a populist, radically inclusive survey of what artists in New York are really creating outside the filtering systems of galleries, museums and curators. It seems, for example, that many are making paintings. In salon-style, floor-to-ceiling hangings you will find every conceivable kind of two-dimensional creativity: Minimalist monochromes; Color Field stained canvases; finely and loosely grained patterning; cartoon allegories and sensitively observed still lifes. Quality, it must be noted, is extremely inconsistent. There are wonderful things, dumb things and inexplicable things. Three-dimensional work is similarly pluralistic and uneven. There is a smattering of videos.

Despite the inclusion of works by well-known artists like Cindy Sherman, Ron Gorchov and Jean-Michel Basquiat, the show feels driven mainly by the energies of M.F.A.-degreed strivers, hardly any of whom would turn down an opportunity to show in a Chelsea gallery. Like a commercial art fair, the exhibition is fun and exhilarating at first, then the diversity and quantity are numbing and, finally, depressing. So who is truly served by the Brucennial? The answer is clear: no one is cooler than the Bruce High Quality Foundation.

KEN JOHNSON

Kay Rosen

"Wide and Deep"

Sikhema Jenkins
530 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through March 10

The big, gray block letters extending almost 45 feet across one paler gray gallery wall spell "Kandahar." Evidently more letters at either end were cropped by the limits of the wall. To the far left, there is a white "C" and, to the right, a white "D." The title of this mind-stretching mural by Kay Rosen explains what is missing: "Between a Rock and a Hard Place."

Is it meaningful that the name of one of the world's most violently conflicted locales should be buried within a phrase that describes that place's possibly



WILLIE DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Brucennial 2012, an exhibition of hundreds of works shown in salon format, at 159 Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village.



DEBORAH COHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Material," a collection of art, artifacts, textiles, furniture, books and garments organized by Duro Olowu at Salon 94 Freemans.



KAY ROSEN, SIKHEMA JENKINS & COMPANY, NEW YORK



NOLAN HENDRICKSON

Above, Kay Rosen's "Between a Rock and a Hard Place" at Sikhema Jenkins. Left, Nolan Hendrickson's "Placeholder Eyes" at Ramiken Crucible.

Nolan Hendrickson

"New New Face"

a painterly Olympics of identity and desire.

With flowers in their hair and tufts of chest hair protruding from their leotards and jockstraps, they swing from gymnastics rings or cartwheel across the canvas. Most have blue noses and kneepads of the same color; some have yellow stripes that run the length of their flat, rubbery limbs. Behind them are Roman arcades, Egyptian pyramids, and (in one perplexing instance) a "Connect 4" board.

A broken fuchsia ribbon crossing the foreground of each painting could be a finish line, but it's hard to pick out a winner; the figures overlap with one another and sometimes seem to be merging with their own shadows. In Mr. Hendrickson's electric celebration of the active body, everything, including sexuality and the surface of the canvas, is in perpetual motion.

KAREN ROSENBERG

Duro Olowu: Material

Salon 94 Freemans
1 Freeman Alley, between the Bowery and Chrystie Street,
Lower East Side
Through March 31

If the ultra-Conceptual, under-visual, often color-free curatorial approach endemic to New York gallery group shows is wearing thin, spend some time sorting through "Material," the walk-in amalgam of art, artifacts, textiles, furniture, jewelry, books and garments assembled by the London-based lawyer-turned-fashion-designer Duro Olowu. More pop-up shop than exhibition, the dense presentation moves through time and across continents (Europe, Africa, North America). It is an inspired exercise in cross-pollination and recycling.

For example, risqué photographs from the 1950s by the Italian designer Carlo Molino are here, along with Martino Gamper's furniture, which consists of cut-up and reassembled Molino chairs. The carved painted coffins by the Ghanaian artist Paa Joe — including a giant camera — are juxtaposed with Laurie Simmons's photograph of walking objects — including a giant camera. The brilliantly colored cast mortar and styrofoam stools of Sarah Kueng and Lovis Caputo double as abstract sculptures, while American designer John Soderstrom creates a duo of plastic hampers and milk crates qualify as sculptures that might make good planters. Portable they're not, in contrast to the small burly exercises in jubilation that Ludovica Glionca conjures by simply combining bright crumpled paper and wallpaper paste. Katherine Bernhardt contributes abstract paintings loosely based on Moroccan rugs; James Brown is represented by large handsome watercolor collages on linen; and Tony Cox weighs in with bold, paintinglike embroideries of yarn and canvas. The multitasked fashion editor and writer Michael Roberts adds collages of pink flamingos.

Lively appointed color photographic portraits by Philip Kwame Agya and Jaergen

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