

Perfect Art — NYC ART SCENE

The city of eternal youth

By Christopher Bollen



People will tell you the New York art scene is dead. In the last five years alone, precocious trend-watchers have rung the news that the next New York is Los Angeles, is Berlin, is Warsaw, Moscow, Philadelphia, Beijing. With all due respect to those cities and scenes, this information has been wrong. As with gopher holes in a garden, when you push down one entry point, another pops up somewhere in the near vicinity. There may have been a time, all the way until the early 1990s, when you could take a reading on the New York art world to determine its rate of survival. Today there are simply too many pockets of industry, too many orbits of artists in Harlem to the Lower East Side to take a conceivable census. The New York art scene is a big ocean and you can swim in it any which way you want. I have for ten years, and I still don't know more than a few reefs.

Things move fast. Art moves in neighborhoods, and unlike the stereotype of the lone painter in a quiet studio, artists tend to be pack animals; they run together in droves and they're protective of their own loose hierarchies. When I first came to New York in the mid-90s, the West Chelsea district had just caught fire—experimental galleries like Matthew Marks renovated the giant warehouses that collected along the West Side Highway and the Hudson River. It was the birth of what is now somewhat pejoratively called the land of the white cubes, and today those cavernous spaces are home to Manhattan's heavyweight galleries pushing big names for big prices. Big names mean money, they mean sure sales by top collectors, they mean museum interest and retrospectives, they mean high resale values. Metro Pictures shows Roberto Longo's mammoth charcoal waves; Gagosian puts Jeff Koons' giant cracked mirror eggs in the main hall. But here is the one lesson that can be taken from the New York art world in 2007, the one rule that applies. The new heroes of art are not the seven-figure bold names of the 70s and 80s, not the ladies and gentlemen of the textbooks and the McArthur Fellowships. Welcome to the land of the very young.

The adage goes that New York is a city for the very rich and the very young. And today the young have emerged as the real fixation in art. As gallerists clog the graduate art programs looking in advance for the next big thing and as tiny collectives open spaces in the peeling storefronts of run-down

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neighborhoods to find every work sell in their first show, it is apparent that New York is a place that has become obsessed with getting talent on its first try. I can no longer count the number of acquaintances in their twenties who a year ago worked as struggling art handlers and junior assistants only today to be cracking bottles of Cristal around their own assistants while a fresh crop art handlers carry canvases from their studios. If there is a sense that the city in general has lost its rebellious edge in nightlife, it has assuredly found an endless stream of young bohemians interested in getting in on the fast business of selling their work. Little galleries are opening around the clock—in Williamsburg, the East Village, Tribeca, Dumbo, and Upper Chelsea, no longer trying to flag down the overspill from the bigger dealers. Young New York artists are being bought up by mega-collectors like Saatchi and Rubell, seemingly even before the productions make their first appearance to the larger audience. The next generation of New York artists doesn't appear to be disturbed by the mixing of high fashion in high art, nor do many particularly mind the editorial spreads in glossy magazines. Those are concerns of the past generations. And this is not to say that youth has sold out, rather the old definitions of what it means to be an artist have been rewritten. Sincerity can still dress up and attend the ball.

Who do we have then? We have Terence Koh opening at the Whitney Museum and doing a costly all-white laser-light performance at Deitch. We have Rivington Arms gallery pulling sharp, unseen talent out of friendship pools and having bigger gallerists clamoring to steal them for their own stables. The art economy is hot, with a crescendo of \$\$\$\$ and when there is no longer one predictable group that determines what art is and who makes it, the idea seems to be, buy fast and buy a lot. A few months ago, three friends of mine,

Ryan McGinley, Dan Colen, and Dash Snow, appeared on the cover of New York Magazine. They were lying in bed in their underwear, as if the three were sidelined all morning with hangovers. Two years ago this thought of them on the cover would have been laughable, toasted as a joke before downing a few shots late at night. Not because their art doesn't merit the front page of a mainstream city rag—these three artists make incredible pieces—but rather, the thought was: why would most of the neat-and-clean town want to know about the crazy, messy, hilarious world of such peculiar, rocked-out kids? Apparently, we were wrong. Apparently these are the boys, once the outcasts, who are now running the playground.

The coverline of the story read “Warhol's Children.” The connection seemed to be either the three were partying like the hangers on of the Factory days or their art suggested the mass-cultural, consumer IT-ness of the Pop Master's oeuvre. Both are arguable on paper (tenuous in intellect), but there is a certain truth to the idea that, so many decades later, so late in the game, Warhol's ghost does haunt the studios of young New York artists today. Warhol, the ultimate outsider, the idiot savant, the marginalized weakling, built a movement and a family out of his own sidelined position. That pretty much sums up a whole segment of New York, the one we are talking about here—talented delinquents coming far from home and creating a network of artists, gallerists, writers, drug addicts, socialites, gamblers, musicians, and lovers. There is a power to choosing your own family out of the scraps of other ones left behind. As long as Warhol still stands as the forefather of art right now, New York will be the town most likely to follow his footsteps. And we'll all be Warhol's foster kids a little bit, whether we want to admit that fact or not.