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Julie Mehretu

EMPIRICAL CONSTRUCTION: ISTANBUL
(2003).

THEY MAKE CROCHETED CAMPFIRES, VIDEOS OF *LAS MENINAS*, AND SCULPTURES OF WHITE-COLLAR CRIMINALS. SOME OF THEM EVEN PAINT. THE TOP 10 YOUNG ARTISTS TO WATCH IN THIS YEAR'S SHOW.

By KAREN ROSENBERG | Photographed by ROBERT MAXWELL

BIENNIAL FAVORITES

THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL HAS LONG BEEN *the* show that everyone feels the need to have an opinion about—and the safest opinion has usually been a negative one. ¶ But this year's version, opening March 11, may just elude the Biennial curse. For one thing, its three young curators—Chrissie Iles, Shamim M. Momin, and Debra Singer—have wisely steered clear of the single-theme approach that spawned the “political biennial” of 1993 and the “Internet biennial” of 2000. They've also learned their lessons from Lawrence Rinder's 2002 edition, which was heavy on obscure collectives and light on coherence. Instead, the curators chose a seemingly innocuous buzzword, “intergenerational,” that makes room for the likes of David Hockney and Yayoi Kusama as well as the many contemporary artists influenced by the style and political radicalism of sixties and seventies art. This is also the first Biennial under director Adam Weinberg, who succeeded the controversial Maxwell Anderson (though in the end that may not mean much, since he arrived after the list was finalized). ¶ But while dissecting the show is inevitably great sport, every Biennial succeeds in spotlighting new talent, like these ten young artists we think are well worth watching.



JULIE MEHRETU

THE DRAFTSWOMAN

If Arshile Gorky and Frank Gehry made a painting together, it might look something like the work of Julie Mehretu. The 33-year-old artist approaches her medium with the mind-set of a disciplined architectural visionary—studying floor plans, poring over maps of urban centers, and reading Rem Koolhaas.

The painting she's showing at the Whitney, *Empirical*

Construction: Istanbul, is one of her largest to date: a 10-by-15-foot tour de force that blends fragmentary views of Istanbul's Old City with geometric forms. It's also, says Mehretu—who's lived in Addis Ababa, Dakar, and Kalamazoo—"the only painting I've made so far based on one particular city." For her next project, she's studying another densely populated site: the sports stadium. While she admits to attending the occasional Knicks game, she's more interested in "ideas of nationalism, the fervor that happens in a stadium." As for the prospect of a Gehry-designed Nets arena in Brooklyn, she's politic enough to reserve comment.

THE EL AL TRAIN:

The bicultural Emily Jacir commutes between Williamsburg and the West Bank.

CHRISTIAN HOLSTAD

THE HANDYMAN

"I picked up a bunch of different skills from having freelance jobs for years," says Christian Holstad, 31. "I can sew



Christian Holstad

FEAR GIVES COURAGE WINGS (2003).

and do construction. I used to do some plumbing." He's also dressed the windows at Bergdorf's, dyed fabric for Lucy Barnes, and had a line of knit hats at Barneys. Most of these crafts find their way into his art: a mix of sculpture, installation, photography, drawing, collage, and performance in which gay culture and disco figure prominently. Think Martha Stewart in her Studio 54 days, if she'd had them.

At the Whitney, Holstad will show several of his soft sculptures, including a crocheted campfire and a pair of obsessively reworked rollerskates last seen at Daniel Reich's gallery; his next solo show at Reich opens the same week as the Biennial. (The first one, in 2002, was a watershed for artist and dealer alike.)

When he's not crocheting on the L train on his way to yoga, Holstad can be found performing with fellow artists Delia Gonzalez and Gavin Russom in the populist dance group Black Leotard Front. But despite the frequent references to nightlife in



Emily Jacir

DETAIL FROM HANA, FROM THE SERIES "WHERE WE COME FROM" (2001-03).

his work, he rarely goes to a club. "If you're a yogi," Holstad says, "you get up early."

EMILY JACIR

THE DEFT POLITICIAN

Emily Jacir is a relative rarity among conceptual political artists, successfully mixing humor with pathos. The 33-year-old, who divides her time between a studio in

navian black metal is a much different sound. It tends more toward abstraction.”

Violette is part of a circle of young artists (including his friends Sue de Beer and Matt Greene) working with goth and horror narratives, but the most haunting element of his work is, in fact, his drawing technique, which produces ethereal, X-ray-like gradients from mere graphite. “They’ve got this slab-like quality,” he says, “but if people blow on them really hard, they’ll just fall away.”

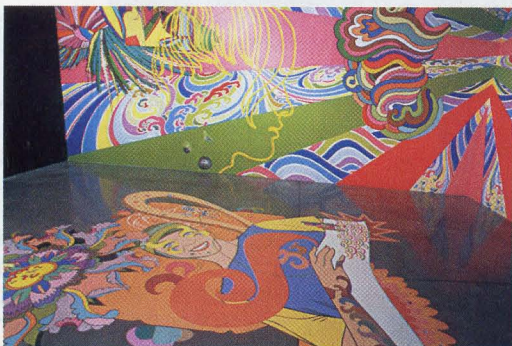
For the Biennial, Violette moves from goth to grunge, with an installation of drawings and sculptures linking Kurt Cobain to his idol Neil Young. “It’s about what happens when somebody blurs their idea of themselves with some kind of script,” he says. The script in question is Young’s lyric “It’s better to burn out than to fade away,” famously invoked in Cobain’s suicide note. It’s a dilemma faced by artists as well as rock stars, but Violette is likely to do neither.

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS

THE ONE-MAN COLLECTIVE

If New York’s collective scene has a Warhol-like ringleader, it’s Eli Sudbrack, the Brazilian-born individual behind the artist-cum-brand Assume Vivid Astro Focus (his alias, just as we suspected, is a hybrid of a Throbbing Gristle album title and the eighties band Ultra Vivid Scene). Still, he insists that he’s “not a collective,” adding, “I collaborate with different people at different times for different projects, you know?”

Regardless, AVAF seemed to be everywhere at once last year, wallpapering the “teenage bedroom” installation at John Connelly Presents and holding court at Deitch Projects with psychedelic murals, a music video, and a roomful of plastic toys. For the Biennial, he (it?) joins forces with the Los Angeles-based



Assume Vivid Astro Focus

DETAIL FROM ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS V (2002).

music collective Los Super Elegantes and the D.J. Honeygun Labs on a multimedia stage set for LSE’s Biennial performance. AVAF has also teamed up with the Public Art Fund to produce a groovy floor sticker for the roller-disco ring in Central Park.

Meanwhile, Sudbrack, 36, seems stuck between relishing and disavowing his own downtown fame. “I would rather

people not use my name, ever,” he says grandly. “And that’s a hard task; people are always going back to ‘you.’”

AÏDA RUILOVA

THE CULT CLASSICIST

“I’m into horror film, but I’m also into comedy that’s extreme,” says the video artist Aïda Ruilova, 29. Like her current mentor, the kinky French vampire-flick director Jean Rollin, she’s clearly comfortable with both genres. Ruilova’s short-format videos of people writhing and grimacing in hallways and stairwells exploit B-movie effects, turning the suspenseful into the ludicrous with simple tricks of compression and repetition. “They’re about feelings of tension, unresolved, and depravity, but also optimism,” she says sunnily.

Here Ruilova weaves together several of her videos in a site-specific installa-

SCREAM QUEEN: Ruilova’s work takes on vampires, avant-garde film, “depravity, but also optimism.”



Aïda Ruilova

STILL FROM COME HERE (2002).





Olav Westphalen
STATUE (2003).

tion. In her "remix," she pays special attention to sound—which, in her projects, is typically chopped into a jarring, stop-and-start series of utterances. She certainly has an ear for noise: A classically trained pianist who also favors death metal, Ruilova spent time in the no-wave band Alva (on John Zorn's experimental-music label).

This odd marriage of the cultish and the classic is just what one might expect from an artist who recently made a book of 100 "wispy little pencil drawings" of vampire heads—another homage to Rollin. The aging filmmaker even has a cameo in *Tuning*, one of Ruilova's new works, holding the artist's hand. "What's interesting about him is the idea of a director doing the same film over and over again for 30 years," she says. Her own work, fortunately, is evolving at a faster pace.

OLAV WESTPHALEN

THE COURT JESTER

Most artists hate to have their work dismissed as a "one-liner," but for Olav Westphalen, it's actually something of a compliment. Formerly a TV writer and cartoonist in his native Germany, the 40-year-old Brooklynite has parlayed his sometimes abject, always absurd humor into projects like last summer's *First Long Island City Blimp Derby* at the Sculpture Center, a race of radio-controlled miniature blimps, and an ongoing series of art-world caricatures. (In one, a Klansman proclaims, "It gives me great pleasure to announce that our annual rally will be choreographed by Vanessa Beecroft!")

At the Whitney, he will be showing several of his hand-carved, "folksy" statues of white-collar criminals in handcuffs. Don't expect to recognize a Waksal or Kozlowski, though; Westphalen insists that the sculptures represent stock characters—"like the bank robber or the medieval gypsy"—and that they're equal parts "adoration and criticism." He'll also be presenting drawings from a series based on photographs of tigers (not including the one that mauled Roy) in the *New York Times*. "Either there's a picture editor there that has a thing for tigers, or there's actually something underneath it," Westphalen says conspiratorially. "There would be stories about tigers in captivity just as Guantánamo Bay opened up!"

KATY GRANNAN

THE PHOTOGRAPHER OF MODERN LIFE

"My work is very deliberate," says Katy Grannan, "but it's not highly staged at all." It's a subtle point that distinguishes her from such Yale contemporaries as Justine Kurland—not to mention her old professor Gregory Crewdson, who included Grannan in his seminal 1999 group show of young female photographers, "Another Girl, Another Planet."

Recruiting models in small towns through a combination of personal ads, friends' recommendations, and direct overtures to strangers, Grannan, 34, gains entry to their homes and photographs them under unnervingly intimate conditions (more often than not, her subjects strip for the camera). She's often compared to Diane Arbus, but the difference is that her photographs come across as both intrusive and conspiratorial.

At the Biennial, look for three photo-



Katy Grannan

CARLA AND PIT BULL, GATE HOUSE ROAD, NEW PALTZ, N.Y. (2003).

graphs from Grannan's latest series, "Sugar Camp Road." Taken in upstate New York, they feature ordinary people exposing themselves, physically and psychologically, on public lands. If the subjects of her plein-air portraits seem plucked from Manet canvases, it's no coincidence; Grannan is one of a select group of younger photographers in a Biennial dominated by painting and drawing. "I'd been photographing inside people's homes for years," she says with a laugh, "and I literally just had to get out of the house."



Dario Robleto

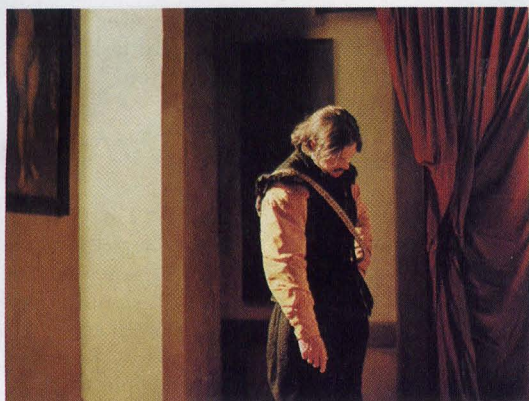
AT WAR WITH THE ENTROPY OF NATURE/
GHOSTS DON'T ALWAYS WANT TO COME BACK
(2002).

DARIO ROBLETO

THE NEW BOHEMIAN

"I'm part of a whole generation that's probably here because of rock and roll," says the San Antonio, Texas-based artist Dario Robleto, 31. That said, his respect for the music of his parents doesn't stop him from melting and recasting their LPs into small, exquisitely crafted sculptures. "People get mad at me for ruining a record, but once I explain my rationale, they usually shut up," he says. Robleto's other materials of choice—dinosaur bones, meteorites, even woolly-mammoth hairs, obtained through esoteric collectors' circles—further insinuate that sixties idealism has become, in effect, fossilized.

His Whitney offering is perhaps his most literal to date, including a suitcase of handmade, homeopathic remedies for "the problems of a hippie living in 2004 . . . everything from arthritis to lack of hope." His sculptures appear to bait boomers with titles like *Our Sin Was in Our Hips* and *Sixties Radicals Forgot to Stay Suspicious*, but they also wax nostalgic for a more authentic cultural period. "What does my generation have to compare to the energy of that moment?" Robleto asks. "Where's my Bob Dylan?" ■



Eve Sussman

THE KING SLEEPS, STILL FROM 89 SECONDS AT ALCAZAR (2003).

Williamsburg and her parents' house in Ramallah on the West Bank, is known for such work as *Sexy Semite*, in which she asked Palestinians living in New York to place personal ads seeking Israeli mates in the *Village Voice* "so they could return home, utilizing Israel's law of return." The *New York Post* was not amused, but the art press has been kinder.

At the Whitney, she will show photographs from the series "Where We Come From," in which she asked exiled Palestinians, "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Taking advantage of her American passport, she carried out their requests, which ranged from playing soccer with a boy in Haifa to visiting a mother's grave. Traveling between the West Bank and the U.S., Jacir says she's become very aware of the things that most Americans take for granted. "It's completely amazing to be able to drive here without stopping," she says. "It's in the precise moment of being able to experience something like that that I'm least able to enjoy it."

EVE SUSSMAN

THE PAINTERLY AUTEUR

"This was sort of like making ten minutes of a costume-drama feature film," says Eve

Sussman. In *89 Seconds at Alcazar*, she presents a ten-minute loop based on Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, with actors playing members of the Hapsburg family. "That painting has the cinéma-vérité quality that only a snapshot has," says Sussman, "and it predates photography by centuries." At 42, Sussman is one of the Biennial's older "emerging" artists, but if her breakout moment has been a long time coming, it seems to have definitely arrived. To make

Alcazar, Sussman met with one of the world's foremost Velázquez scholars and teamed up with Jonathan Bepler, who composed the score for Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* series. But any similarities between her and Barney end there. "Where theatricality and real life mix—that, to me, is more interesting than the lavish theatricality that Barney does," she says. *89 Sec-*

onds at Alcazar nevertheless promises to be one of this Biennial's epic experiences.

BANKS VIOLETTE

THE GROWN-UP GOTH

Biennial curator Chrissie Iles has described Banks Violette's work as embodying "the dark side of the heavy-metal American dream." (We'll confess that we were unaware there was a light side.) His high-contrast drawings and onyxlike sculptures, full of references to Satanic ritual murder and suicidal Judas Priest fans, certainly seem to fit that description. Ask him about metal, though, and the soft-spoken 30-year-old launches into an elaborate taxonomy: "I don't really like death metal all that much. It's an American variation, all about sounding scary. The singing is like a really pissed-off Cookie Monster," he says. "Scandi-

MUSICAL INFLUENCES: Banks Violette's Biennial work focuses on Kurt Cobain's connection to Neil Young.



Banks Violette

POWDERFINGER CHRIST (KURT COBAIN)
4.1.94 (2003).

WHY HAIRDRESSERS ARE THE NEW ROCK STARS
BUILDING A BETTER WHITNEY BIENNIAL: TEN ARTISTS TO WATCH

NEW YORK

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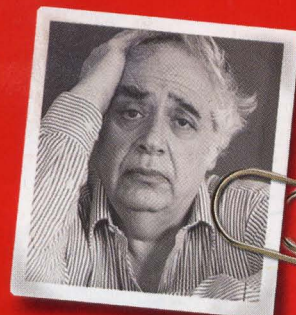
sex & silence at yale

BY NAOMI WOLF



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She was a Yale senior. He was a star professor. And his unwanted seduction attempt—along with her failure to report it—prompted a crisis of conscience that simmered for 20 years. **NAOMI WOLF** on **HAROLD BLOOM**, sexual misconduct on campus, and why universities like Yale still don't get it.



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