

“20/20” SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS UNDERGRADUATE CATALOG ESSAY 2013

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"I'm thinking about that moment where the fine arts undergraduate end-of-course show is installed, but the public has not yet seen it, at 8.45am on the day of the final assessment. Similar to the moment before a party begins, display is paramount. People have been up till 2am the night before, with hot-glue guns and masking tape, with plastic bags of installation bits and bobs.

This is the end of the degree, the work is made (or not), the mission fulfilled or overstepped into new territories. There is a quiet in the studio. The years, months, hours, minutes of cacophony and struggle are over. At this point the student artists can relax, recover, decompress, unwind and let go. And this moment is groundbreaking because it is the first time these young artists experience that feeling...The show's finished. Now what?

Let's hold onto that thought, that moment before consumption, judgement, assessment and re-engagement. It's the artist's moment to breathe. The post-partum moment. This moment of art school graduation is defining. A student artist's work can provide a litmus test of future possibilities for the culture, an oracular moment, a fortune-teller's prophecy that frustratingly we can barely yet grasp. Artists like poets run across ideas and thoughts long before others do. This show is the closest thing we have to an uncensored, unbranded, unpackaged, unmuzzled voice of contemporary art.

This much is clear. Students graduating now are no longer kowtowing to the existing dominant art systems because everything is up for grabs. The Clement Greenberg world, Warhol's death, the Culture Wars of the 1980s, and post-pluralism of recent time are over. All earlier paradigms are rendered redundant in a new globalized digitalized artworld.

A new breed of artists is responsible for reshaping the terms of curatorial and artistic engagement. As witnessed in the Berlin and British art scenes, a generation of artist-culture-preneurs emerged since the 1990s who have hijacked the traditional gallery pyramid system, leapfrogging their way to collectors and auction houses, sidestepping the gallery/critic gate-keeper channels. Rather than victims of an overloaded art market or delinquent curators, younger artists are aware of sharper strategies, spurred by a system where they find themselves playing on an uneven field, performing on a new stage where the proscenium has moved.

Let us stay with that moment where the fine arts undergraduate final exhibition is installed but not yet viewed. It is waiting in the early light of the assessment day. We witness a moment of latency, immanence, and divine possibility. Read these signs of art, the double-coded stuttering of new languages, idioms and cartographies. They are the stammering glyphs of vocabularies and aesthetic revolutions yet to come.

In this year's 20/20 catalog we witness some of these new tendencies and their mutant marriages. Much of this year's exhibition features a renewed concern with the natural world: context-driven installation, and complex, post-digital fourth-dimensional environments. The work ranges from the diaristic to an interest in deep architectural space. There is a new fascination with the uncanny object and the viral, as well as a return to the body and blood using computer software, through bio art, documented video performance and fragmentary new cinematic languages. In painting there is an engagement with abstraction's reconstitution, and with memories of past, aberrant, archaic, outmoded political systems of the Cold War.

What is clearly discernable about younger artists working in the post-Koons era is that they are moving away from 1990s Grand Guignol gestures, and from first-wave Po-Mo finish fetish. The new generation is returning to an economy of means, to subtle strategies. Their works are created for slow release. They are less heavy-handed and more cryptic.

Some works in the show engage with visual density and physical structures refracted through emerging digital means. Others concern the morph, the disembodied machine-life and the mutant prosthetic amoeboid form bursting out of the laboratory. There is a return to poetics and the ephemeral, the fragmentary and fragile. This is not the short-lived, 1990s NYC “abject art” movement. This new iteration possesses delicacy, hybridity and a lightness of gesture, shot through with a fragility, decisiveness and permanence.

Several works in this catalog illustrate this deftness of hand, showing a re-engagement with installation and conceptual forms, but using contemporary tropes (dry ice, fiber optics, fluorescent materials), with a light, playful -but decisive- hand and eye. They hypnotize us with optical soccer, the day-glo, the plastic, the synthetic real. This play constitutes an interrogation of the “real” in the era of the virtual.

There is above all in this year’s graduating show a tremendous quickness and facility with form, and guile-free montaging which juxtapose genres and movements into seamless new hybrid forms. Personal visions are carved out, rinsed and repasted into art for the new media age.

Take a close look at this early morning moment, watch closely now. These new languages are readable if you look carefully.

-Rupert Goldsworthy