

YOUNGER THAN JESUS: ARTIST DIRECTORY

Phaidon Press/New Museum, 2009, £25, ISBN 978-0-7148498-1-2



At the end of 2007 the New Museum in New York reopened in an eye-catching new home on the suddenly-much-less-derelect Bowery. Designed by trendy Tokyo architects SANAA, the building's blocky, top-heavy silhouette immediately became its own logo. Unfortunately, the interior spaces turned out to be adverse to the display of art. With a savvy group of curators on staff, the shows there have been timely but never look as good as they deserve to. Another calling card was needed, and what better than a new biennial? Well, alright then, since New York already has one of those, make it a triennial. Anyway, the model would be less the Whitney's effort than the two Greater New York shows (in 2000 and 2005) that had done so well for PS1 by feeding into the rip-roaring market's seemingly insatiable hunger for tender young meat, fodder for speculation. Why not do the same but on a global rather than a local scale?

The timing was a bit off, as it turns out. Whatever the real value ever was of an institution's being a step ahead of the collectors, it looks like less of a feat in 2009— when what collectors are probably mostly heading for is the door—than it would have a couple of years ago. Well, at least the New Museum came up with a title as eye-catching as its building: Younger Than Jesus—artists over 33 being persona non grata in this 'generational', as they call it. But would the content of the exhibition be as sensational? Luckily for everyone, probably, most of it didn't try (don't get me started on the overblown installations by Ryan Trecartin). But some of it looked a lot like the same 'young art' I've been seeing over and over again under ever-changing names for more than 20 years now. Adding YouTube into the mix of sources isn't really enough of an innovation.

How did curators Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, and Laura Hoptman come up with the artists they chose? The process sounds a lot like the way Phaidon Press has gone about assembling its successful Vitamin books (all of which, I should acknowledge, I have been involved with, to one degree or another; the latest, Vitamin 3D: New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation has just come out, and from a graphic viewpoint it's the best of them yet). As with that series, an international network of curators, critics, artists, and other knowledgeable authorities was asked to make nominations; from the 500+ names they came up with, the 50 Younger Than Jesus were chosen.

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Video by Rallou Panagiotou
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Given the resemblance, it's not surprising that, as a supplement to the exhibition and its catalogue, Phaidon itself has published a sort of supplement, *Younger Than Jesus: Artist Directory*, which gives a page apiece to all the nominees, both the anointed and the also-rans. Each artist gets three to six images along with a very brief paragraph indicating his or her place of birth and current residence and educational background along with a sentence or two on the work's thematic and (sometimes) formal underpinnings, sometimes with a description of a typical project. Only Tino Sehgal, who doesn't allow pictures of his work, has thereby gained a bit more room for text, though still not the whole page; it takes a lot of space to represent the absence of images. Glasgow-based Rob Churm, for instance, 'makes drawings using felt-tip and ballpoint pen and India ink on paper, combining surreal characters, gestural marks, dense cross-hatching, and references to Japanese illustration', while Ruth Ewan's works 'suggest contemporary applications of socialist and utopian histories. Her practice often includes a large degree of community organising.'

All of which means that (unlike the Vitamin books) what's missing is even the slightest critical perspective on any of the illustrated work. Each artist's project is reduced to a sound bite. And because there is no bibliography or list of exhibitions or indication of the artist's (or gallery) websites—doesn't 'directory' mean it directs you to something, like further information?—it's hard not to leave it at that. You're going to have to start doing a lot of googling if you want to get past who's in and who's out. But then, maybe that's not the point. Investments—financial or emotional—in young artists are rarely based on what they have done, but rather on what they might do. There will be artists here whom you know from first-hand experience to be excellent—I spotted Carol Bove and Keren Cytter, among others—and ones you recognise as massively over-promoted (take a bow, Loris Gréaud), but of necessity the vast majority will be (and mostly remain) a mystery. So turn the pages and dream what their art might be. You're sure to find something you think you like. But what about a book or exhibition about underrated artists old enough for a bus pass? Maybe call it *Older Than Methuselah*.

Barry Schwabsky is a writer and poet based in London

The transparent tortoiseshell and the un-ripe umbrella': FOOTNOTES

The beginning of a series of footnotes to Glasgow Sculpture Studios' new exhibition. Text by Louise Briggs
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AFTERWORD

Louise Briggs, curator of 'The transparent tortoiseshell and the un-ripe umbrella', provides an intimate insight into the thought process behind the show which takes place at Glasgow Sculpture Studios 23 January - 5 March 2016 and includes work by Eva Berendes, Stephanie Mann, Rallou Panagiotou, Vanessa Safavi and Samara Scott
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