

to a piece of music. If we want more information, we can seek it out, but reading the 'information' is an unavoidable part of even beginning to understand nearly all art shown in galleries today. Of course I want to know more about artists and their subject matter, but if the main point of a work of art has to be explained on a piece of paper, is there any point in looking any more? So, all in all, I'd like to think that my subconscious was empathising with the mattress when it toppled me over. ☒

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The Influentials

School of Visual Arts New York

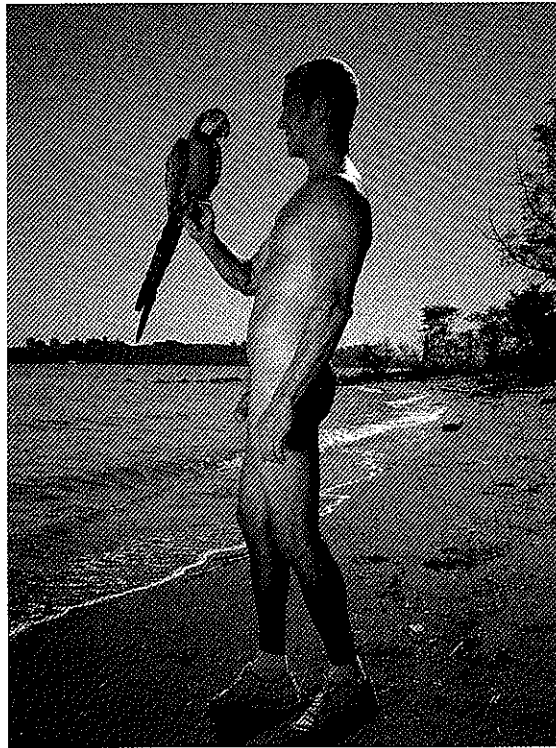
26 August to 21 September

The notion of 'influence' has become unfashionable in recent art criticism. 'The Influentials: SVA Women Alumni invite artists who have shaped their work' challenges this by acknowledging the influence of mentors on younger artists. The curators of the exhibition, Amy Smith-Stewart and Carrie Lincourt, invited 19 female artists and SVA alumni to select an artist or person of influence to show alongside them. The result is a compelling array of artists who share common themes including the use of everyday materials and found objects, the notion of handcraft and an abiding interest in gender politics.

The School of Visual Arts, located in Manhattan, has traditionally been a rival to prestigious MFA programmes, including those at Yale and Columbia University. In past decades distinguished tutors – such as Eva Hesse, Joseph Kosuth, Lynda Benglis and Robert Mangold – have given the school a status that defies its reputation for running on adjunct faculty. 'The Influentials' shows the plethora of successful students who have recently graduated from the school, as well as those role models guiding their younger colleagues.

The exhibition is spread across four rooms of the SVA Gallery. Unlike other university galleries, SVA's space is off campus, on the western border of Chelsea, located on the 15th floor of the landmark Starrett-Lehigh Building, a multipurpose monolithic high rise. Except for a terrace that boasts an astonishing view, the spaces are brutal; however, the curators have refuted any architectural stoicism with their exuberant and diverse exhibition. Many works are large-scale and colourful, and there is a good balance of wall-based and three-dimensional as well as static and moving work. Artists and their 'influentials' are hung near each other, but the curators resisted any urge to hang the show in obvious pairs.

The entrance gallery is dominated by two large sculptures: Marianne Vitale's *Double Decker Outhouse*, 2011, and Michelle Lopez's *Woodsummer (edit)*, 2009. Vitale's work, made of reclaimed lumber, reaches to a height of 12ft, with a structure that combines



Mika Rottenberg
Vincent and Dexter
from *Tropical Breeze*
2004
photograph

high modernist and vernacular architectural tropes. Lopez's sculpture is mounted on the wall and is formed by a discarded car chassis partially covered by leather, which both conceals and reveals the structure beneath. The contrast of materials – industrial steel and supple leather – is indicative of the work's existence between two genres, straddling painting and sculpture. This is also symbolic of the gender divide. In the accompanying catalogue the artist states: 'I like to think about androgyny in art – where both male and female exist simultaneously.'

Both Lopez and Vitale chose male figures as their 'influentials', whose works also correspond in their diminutive scale, contrasting with the ambitiously scaled pieces of the younger artists. Vitale chose Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr, who is represented by a poster from his seven-hour masterpiece *Sátantango*, 1994, which was a formative viewing experience for her while studying at SVA. Lopez's mentor, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, is represented by three modest pieces, *Chalice I, II and III*, c1990. These small works belie their humble materials – foil, tape, tinsel and staples – by both their context – three plinths placed in a triangular position that suggests the trilogy – and the spotlighting, whereby the works gleam like sacred relics.

Also in this room a more obvious pairing is found in four photographs hung in a line along one wall: two by Huma Bhaba document her iconic sculptures set in different outdoor contexts, while a pair by Yamini Nayar confound explanation, documenting abstract sculptural configurations that the artist makes from discarded materials. The relationship between Nayar and her

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mentor is directly explicated by the photographs chosen for the show; more subtle is the relationship between works throughout the gallery, for example Nayar's work has as much in common with Lopez or Vitale as with their 'influentials'.

While sculpture dominates the first gallery, the second space has a more minimal feel. Except for one floor-based sculpture by Trish Tillman (also made of found objects), this space is dominated by wall-based work that includes photography, drawing and video. Marilyn Minter's *Green Pink Caviar*, 2009, is projected directly across from Kate Gilmore's *Between a Hard Place*, 2008. Minter was chosen by two artists: Gilmore and Mika Rottenberg. Minter, whose career blossomed later in life, is the epitome of a successful woman artist: she paints glamorous yet defiant female subjects. Often focusing on the mouth, which is the main protagonist of *Green Pink Caviar*, the orifice is depicted as both sensual and terrifying in bold cinematic color. This is echoed formally in Gilmore's video, where the artist is seen bashing through grey walls to reveal a vibrant yellow interior.

A third gallery is the most elegant in the exhibition. A large-scale Judy Pfaff work dominates the room, which combines sculpture, painting and smaller scale books and ephemera. Elif Uras shows a pair of ceramic sculptures on two wooden plinths. Made with traditional tile-makers in Iznik, Turkey, the pair suggests the abstracted female body, especially in the bulbous vertical form of *Line Belly*, 2011. Amy Wilson, whose handcrafted books are shown in vitrines, employs a naive style combined with everyday materials, such as paper and felt. This is in contrast with her 'influential', *Riot Girl*, represented by fanzines and a 45 record sleeve.

The penultimate room of the show contains many compelling pieces. Katherine Burnhardt's brightly rendered abstract painting finds its reflection in her mentor Terra Fuller's handwoven carpet placed on the floor. Burnhardt visited Fuller in Morocco, where the latter lived with nomadic cave dwellers and learned the female art of carpet weaving. Burnhardt's painting references this directly and she acknowledges the influence of women who weave on her work. Indeed, the plight of the female is a direct concern in this room, from Amy Stein and Jo Ann Walters's photographs of American everywomen to Jeremy Yoder's collage that features a pregnant nude and Tracy Nakayama's apocalyptic sepia drawings. Phoebe Washburn's *Nunderwater not lab*, 2011 – the only piece commissioned for the exhibition – also suggests domestic labour in its intricate and enigmatic system. This sculpture rivals Vitale's totemic structure in its ambitious scale and use of everyday materials such as golf balls, reclaimed wood, hoses and used milk cartons. From beginning to end 'The Influentials' proves that alchemy exists. ■

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Terrible Beauty: Art, Crisis, Change and The Office of Non-Compliance

various venues Dublin 6 September to 31 October

Just as Ireland's government was negotiating the terms of its recent bailout by the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, the *Irish Times* led with a provocative headline. Recalling the fallen revolutionaries of 1916, the paper mooted the rhetorical question: 'Was it for this?' While insinuating that the hard-fought independence of Ireland had simply delivered the country from one paymaster into the hands of another, the editorial refused to absolve the country's own role in the financial debacle. Rather, the recession was the result of a frenzied splurge of property speculation and rampant consumerism, the Celtic Tiger a temporary blip built on extended credit.

In this light, it is appropriate that Jota Castro and Christian Viveros-Fauné, curators of the inaugural Dublin Contemporary exhibition, have decided to reference WB Yeats's poem *Easter 1916* in its title: 'all changed, changed utterly: a terrible beauty is born.' Its revolutionary credentials notwithstanding, the phrase may apply just as well to the current crisis and the precariousness of a national identity founded on self-determination through resistance. Concentrated in the neoclassical premises of Earlsfort Terrace, 'Terrible Beauty: Art, Crisis, Change and the Office of Non-Compliance' tends towards reflection, doubt, exhaustion and economy (in both subject matter and a general paucity of materials). At the same time, while notions of recession and recovery persist throughout the exhibition, this theme is perversely undercut by the sheer quantity of artists on show and, at times, the seemingly endless variations of work that lightly critiques consumerism. Even if it all gets a bit overwhelming, one can still find an intriguing correlation between the disorienting passivity of the viewer and more traditional connotations of the sublime suggested by the title. Is there such a thing as Stendhal syndrome for contemporary art audiences?

As a metaphor for Earlsfort Terrace's compartmentalised succession of mostly individual artist rooms, Hans op de Beeck's 2011 film *Sea of Tranquillity*, situated in the adjacent annexe, might suffice. A vast luxury liner drifts through eerily still waters towards an undeclared destination. Broken into a series of vignettes – a jazz singer performing the titular theme, cosmetic eye surgery in unflinching close-up, a woman playing solitaire in her opulent apartment – the decadent surroundings (and the film's high production values) offer no apparent comfort to its muted, melancholic passengers. The relentless crawl of the liner, the slow pan of the camera across frozen cabaret dancers, the detailed exhalation of cigarette smoke – each element is suffused with an atmosphere of ennui. The occupants remain isolated within their respective cabins, their individual scenarios, adrift and alienated from one another despite their shared privilege.

Perhaps there is a lesson here – or an admonition, depending on where you stand. In William Powhida's series of drawings, the commercial interests of the art world are skewed in impeccable

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