

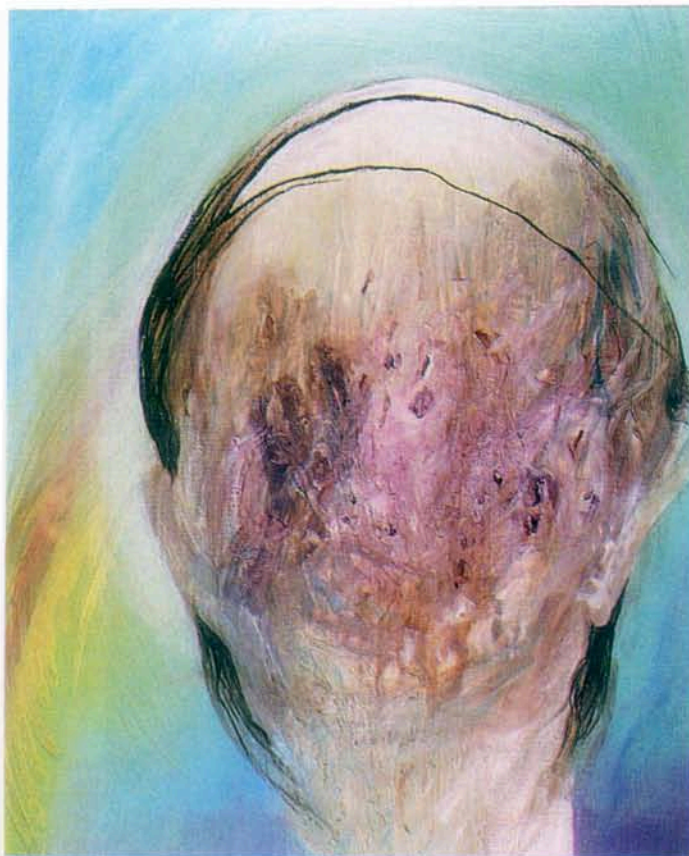
Greater New York

P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, USA

Opening during the dizzying Armory Fair week in March, 'Greater New York 2005' ('GNY05') drew more than the usual attention and anxiety that accompany exhibitions touted as bellwether surveys. Having cast itself at the centre of the current collector-driven obsession with younger artists, 'GNY05' poses its most interesting questions around the miscegenating relationships proliferating between economics, artistic practices and institutions. Deflowered by the overheated market that launched the careers of a number of the artists featured in the first version of this show in 2000 (Do-Ho Suh, Inka Essenhigh, Julie Mehretu and Paul Pfeiffer among them), this reincarnated enterprise had no way of separating itself from the market's engorged desire for some institutional guidance among the sea of young artists now plying their wares in New York.

The 2000 version inaugurated P.S.1's affiliation with The Museum of Modern Art and provided a welcome foil to that year's Whitney Biennial and its habitually ridiculed national pretensions. But the stakes are higher now, and with P.S.1 accepting the burden of representing the 'emerging' art of an entire geography and local mindset – smack in the middle of an art world that continues to balloon beyond the grasp of those who constitute it – the kunsthalle has turned itself into a flashpoint. The curators have, perhaps unwittingly, tapped a spring of rising competitive ambition among local artists, and with their timing and choice of work, insufficiently protected themselves against burgeoning critical apprehension regarding the proximity of the market to exhibiting institutions. The fact that few among its critics can legitimately claim to know New York's aesthetic moment any more thoroughly than the show's curators seems besides the point in this climate, when you half-expect dealers' mobile phone numbers to show up on wall labels. On the one hand, you want to tell the moaners to get over it: there's *always* another New York, and taste is part of the mix. But on the other hand, the interest payments on those graduate school loans aren't getting any cheaper, and no one wants to get stuck without a chair when the cash register stops chiming.

None of this is to say that 'GNY05' isn't a decent show. There is plenty here that looks mildly interesting, if ultimately mostly familiar. As before, 'GNY05' involved a committee of roughly 30 curators from P.S.1 and MoMA, who, along with the directors of the two institutions, reviewed the work of over 2,000 artists and visited hundreds of studios, taking into account suggestions from untold numbers of 'artists, art schools, galleries and other art professionals' and open submission entries. This time, however, the 160-plus artists were specifically supposed to have 'emerged' since the last show, even if there wasn't any clear agreement on what that meant exactly. Complicating matters, the curatorial team, led by P.S.1's Chief



Greater New York: Daniel Hesidence
Untitled (Chambers Street Paintings)
2003 Oil on board 46x38cm

Curator, Klaus Biesenbach, attempted to review artistic production during the past five years while speaking for the present moment and beyond.

This present-past-future undertaking isn't as muddled as it sounds. Elements from the first show reappear and don't feel out of place, making the last five years feel more like a month. Justin Faunce's blooming brand of Pop painting picks up on Erik Parker, just as John J. O'Connor's *Earthquakes and Wars* (2003) and Dominic McGill's *Project for a New American Century* (2004) seem to grow out of the late Mark Lombardi's conspiracy charts. But no one needs to point out that many things have changed in the past five years, a point driven home by the twin columns of smoke in Jules de Balincourt's word painting *United We Stood* (2005). Suicide bombings show up in a handful of pieces, along with other glimmers of political critique.

Artists still have it pretty good, though, if not better than they did five years ago. Amid the wars, lies, fear and recession that have followed 11 September 2001, more money, opportunity and public attention has been lavished on New York artists. Although artists remain affected by the city's general anxieties, the relatively privileged rank afforded emerging artists in particular may account for the status quo feel of

'GNY05'. This may also explain the tone of certain artists' complaints about how the curatorial team failed to return works that had been under consideration for inclusion in time for dealers to sell them at the fair on opening weekend. (Thank goodness for waiting lists!) More ardently, artists and dealers objected to a selection process that seemed at best confusing, at worst arrogant. Stories circulated about artists who had been invited to the informal private salons held by P.S.1/MoMA curators for confirmed artists, only to be later booted from the show. Whatever truth lies behind such tales, the moral is that artists who may once have put up with institutional antics in order to appear in a star-maker show will do so no longer.

In the absence of an arsenal of bold unknown talents or trends the curators nevertheless pulled off a number of deft moves that quietly annotated interesting links and undertones. One hopscotched from Amy Wilson's intimate narrative drawings of women warriors to Paul Chan's animated Armageddons to Adam McEwen's inverted, oversized photograph of the executed Mussolini and his consort. Along related lines, Nebojsa Seric Shoba's video animation of a blackened rotating globe radiating white light from the USA bore a formal relationship to Corey McCorkle's wall-incised halo light piece, which itself called to mind the James Turrell sky space permanently installed on the top floor – linking Turrell's atmospheric sublime to American hegemonic power.

The odd stood out, including Anna Conway's intensely absurd landscapes, Daniel Hesidence's hauntingly strange portraits, Robert Melee's polychromed lair of twisted mommy worship and Laurel Nakadate's disturbed videos of herself horsing around with dirty old men. Other noteworthy contributions came in the form of Meredith Danluck's reverse minstrel video of a tap-dancing white kid singing a James Brown cover, Peter Coffin's disco party in a hollowed-out log, Karyn Olivier's column-supporting coffee table and David Opdyke's suburban sprawl-cum-aircraft carrier model.

The few glaring mis-steps included the removal of Lucio Pozzi's historic permanent commission of little squares that had been painted to match the various wall colours of the building. It received a lame, almost mocking, tribute in Cordy Ryman's colourful little braces crammed into various corners. Peter Caine's silly room of psychedelic Arctic creatures seemed much too derivative of Forcefield and the like, and Will Ryman's pit of amateurish ceramic figures had no justification for being in this show at all, never mind in the prominent duplex gallery, where something wonderful should have happened.

There is much more diversity of artistic practice taking place in New York than can be accommodated by the ramped-up consumerism favoured by art fairs and big surveys. One need only recall P.S.1's own Janet Cardiff retrospective or its recent 'Romantic Detachment' performance series to find great examples of work that depends on our active participation

to create its meaning. The curators of 'GNY05' did hint at a possible performance series, but most of the art in the show needed us even less than we needed it.

In the days leading up to the opening, the dank ecology of the current art scene hit home at a promotional party for *Art Review* magazine's new issue on young American artists – almost a third of whom happened to be part of 'GNY05' – conflated with an exhibition at the Phillips auction house, where galleries of 'emerging' work flowed seamlessly into the rooms of consigned John Currins and Richard Princes. This speeded-up marketing strategy, and 'GNY05's place in this environment, were lampooned in a fake P.S.1 press release sent out the week before the opening, recalling a similar stunt by Lucy Lippard and the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee targeting the 1970 Whitney Annual. The rogue promotional parodied the 'platform' model of the last Documenta, proposing the opening party as a platform and the exhibition itself as simply 'Platform 13, the greatly anticipated show in conjunction with the art fair'. Some of those attending claimed this connection was literalized, perhaps inadvertently, by MoMA Director Glenn Lowry during his remarks at the Armory's opening press briefing, where he hyped 'GNY05' as something of a 'microcosm' of what was on view at the fair.

The anonymous author of the bogus release, whose socialist tone concluded with a vague call for revolution, would probably have appreciated how one of the curators spoke to me of the show's 'Utopian' and 'democratic' ambitions. Her comments recalled Julie Ault's history of alternative art in New York, which cites Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that 'democratic institutions awaken and foster a passion for equality which they can never entirely satisfy'. The organizers of 'GNY05' could have read this as a warning of the impossibility of their task. Then again, we might wonder what's so great about satisfaction when this is what it looks like to be young and desirable in New York City. **Peter Eleey**