

BRITART'S NEW WAVE:WHO ARE THE SUCCESSORS TO HIRST AND EMIN ?

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London's prestigious art-college degree shows are where the gallery stars of the future are often born. Laura McLean-Ferris tours this summer's final exhibitions in search of the next generation.

Full of tension, ambition, sureness and uncertainty, the annual postgraduate art-degree shows are a chance to take a look at how an upcoming generation of artists sees our fast-changing world. Among the families and fellow students visiting the shows are always a number of collectors (despite his dwindling influence, the name of Charles Saatchi is still whispered in the corridors, with "who has he bought?") and talent-spotting gallerists. There have been better times to be graduating. A conservative, shakily recovering art market, diminished public-sector finances and even the Olympics, which will likely see many gallery shows by well-established names, spell a difficult few years after graduating for many of those leaving college this year.

While the YBAs' collective shadow still does hang over London somewhat, the last decade has consolidated backlashes against such bombast, and produced movements away from those artists and their "bold-as-brass" attitudes, their shocks and sensationalism, towards quieter, conceptual, uncertain forms of art, with focuses on hybrid forms and potted histories rather than the sharpened big statements that came from Hirst et al (one might look to the recent British Art Show, for examples of more tentative, unresolved recent artistic inclinations).

This is in part, perhaps unsurprisingly, an effect of the internet. If you want shocks, if you want to see a disturbing image of a gunshot wound, a pornographic film, or strange animals or machines, they are there at the click of a button. McDonough's rescuing of a news story or Goddard's wresting of outdated BBC News intro themes, as well as Schäfer's cobbling together of old musical instruments, are indicative of the artistic processes of this generation, of rescuing stuff from the overwhelming swamp of images and information and putting it to distinct, different uses. This is the cut-and-paste/Wikipedia generation who have grown up with rapid changes in technology that have developed as they have grown older.

Artists seem to be in the business of pulling images, objects and processes, either saving them from a sea of obsolescence or ensuring that they aren't lost in the flood. Old books and screen-printing techniques are revived, alongside dated Casio keyboards, archive footage and sound, and made to tell us something about our contemporary world. An emphasis on traditional sculptural materials (plaster, porcelain, clay, steel) may be evidence of a desire for physical experience now that so much of our lives are lived online.

Many of the works are loaded with references: Soviet design, Minimalist sculpture and the 1980s being major points of departure for many artists today. While artists often become fascinated with the time that they grew up in, there's still a very tangible sense that many of today's young artists are in the business of cobbling together histories, materials and images in order to understand what has happened in the past. They have grown up in a moment analogous to the huge cultural shifts that happened in the 1950s and 1960s in mass media (which explains the popular fascination with watching people going through these changes in television series such as *Mad Men* and *The Hour*).

Will these young artists then, pull things from physical and digital rubble to tell us something more, about where we are today? Perhaps some of them will.

Yelena Popova
RCA

A Russian-born artist, Yelena Popova created an installation of paintings at the RCA. Each painting, featuring thinly painted abstract shapes in pale colour on linen, was installed so that the paintings were propped up on objects at odd angles, making them appear like an interconnected, precarious system. Popova's film, 'Nameless', about a secret town in Russia, is a disturbing exploration of secrecy, nuclear disaster and nationalism, and the relationship between radioactivity and knowledge, in a movie full of frightening and memorable imagery. Popova can be seen in *New Contemporaries 2011*, which launches in Sheffield later this year.

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