

8 Standouts at the 2021 New Museum Triennial: Poetic Resistance, Barely-There Beings, and More

BY **ALEX GREENBERGER** October 27, 2021



Installation view of the 2021 New Museum Triennial, featuring works by Evgeny Antufiev, Hera Büyüктаşçıyan, and Jeneen Frei Njootli.

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The biennial circuit was dealt a blow by the pandemic, which made it nearly impossible to mount enormous editions of recurring showings of contemporary art amid restrictions of all kinds. But art lovers in the U.S. can take pleasure this month in the return of three such notable exhibitions: the Prospect New Orleans triennial in Louisiana, the Greater New York quinquennial at MoMA PS1, and, now, the New Museum Triennial, which opens in New York this Thursday.

Organized by New Museum curator Margot Norton and Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles senior curator Jamillah James, the show is focused on forms of resistance—an apt theme during these trying times. Don't come expecting to see art meditating on lockdown, the Black Lives Matter protests of last summer, or debates over recent conflicts, however. The sleek art on view here may obliquely allude to pressing issues associated with race, gender, and sexuality, and it may even broach painful histories of colonialism in the process, but these

works are rarely upfront about their concerns. In this refreshing exhibition, the artists included largely opt for a sleek aesthetic in which politics are embedded rather than exposed.

Painting is (mostly) out, and a piquantly odd kind of sculpture is in. Surrealism is born anew in works making use of ready-made everyday objects, and industrial materials often share space with natural ones. Science-fictional futures exist in the present, and fine-art and craft techniques are made indivisible. There's a lot going on in the minds of the 40 artists with work on view, some of whom are getting their first showcases in New York, but rarely ever can it be said that their art feels anything less than highly composed. Norton and James's exhibition meets the chaos of the moment with stoicism and serenity.

Below, a look at eight standout artists in their show.

Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho



Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho, *waves move bile*, 2020.
Photo : Alex Greenberger for ARTnews

The ghosts of the past are alive and well in Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho's *waves move bile* (2020), a set of hanging sculptures of women's heads with assemblages resembling organs beneath them. Those heads are based on a statue by Louis Botinelly in Marseilles in which France's Asian colonies are allegorized as a reclining nude. (*Waves move bile* was first shown at the 2020 edition of the roving European biennial Manifesta, which took place in the French city that year.) In Lien and Camacho's hands, that passive figure is turned active. With a

vampiric creature from Southeast Asian folklore in mind, Lien and Camacho have turned this woman into a partially formed phantom lit from within whose fleshless body is repeated five times over. Set inside a darkened gallery, these female figures meet their viewers' gaze, as if ready for battle.