

NEW YORK ARTISTS NOW



It's fashionable these days to decry the influence of money on the art world, to whine about the proliferation of art fairs, the homogeneity of artistic production and the collectors who all buy the same cheesy baubles.

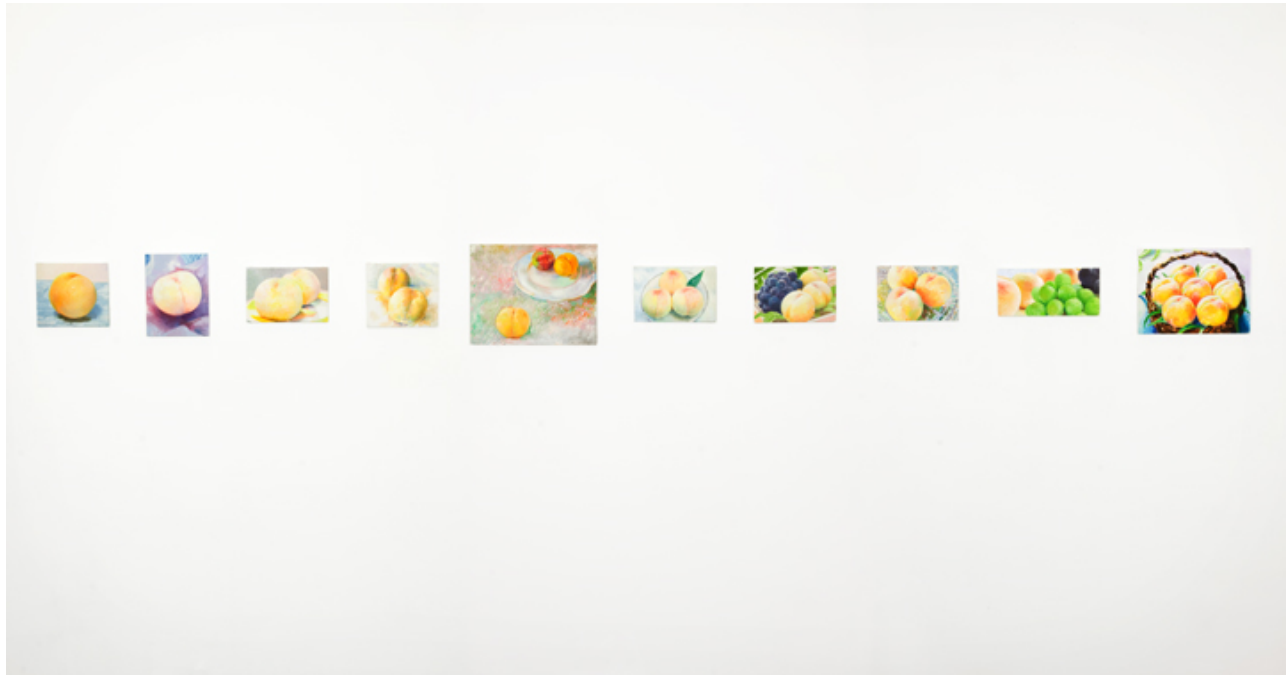
No question, there is a lot of money out there, and much of it is being spent on garbage. But that's always been true. It was Clement Greenberg, decades ago, who identified the "umbilical cord of gold" that links the avant-garde and its buyers.

But even as people worry and complain, New York fosters vital art scenes, and it is doing so today.

The New Museum has just opened "NYC 1993," a show that aims to encapsulate a moment. Let's run a thought experiment and jump 20 years into the future, to 2033. Chelsea Clinton is president. There are 22 Gagosian galleries. The most interesting young artists are on Staten Island, and the New Museum owns a full block on the Bowery. Some wunderkind curators there are organizing "NYC 2013." What should be in it? (The year is only a tenth done, so I'll look back a bit. Indulge me.)

I hope “NYC 2013” begins with photos and videos of performances and one-off events, which have been especially fruitful lately. One took place last month on one of the coldest nights of the year at a theater in East Harlem. In a century-old auditorium that is now an El Mundo discount store soon to go out of business, the artist Rainer Ganahl and collaborators—the artist Ken Okiishi, Juilliard students and others—staged a classical concert (pictured above) in conjunction with the nonprofit White Columns and the store’s owners. They played Debussy, Elgar, Bizet and more amid scattered boxes of clothing and tableware. It was solemn but not mournful, obliquely addressing the city’s state of continuous change.

Paintings by Nolan Simon. (Courtesy the artist and Cleopatra’s)



Add to “2013” a selection of paintings that Nolan Simon showed at Cleopatra’s in Greenpoint. They’re humble still lifes of fruit that turn grotesque with some attention—“gross butts,” another dealer told me, intending, I think, high praise. And invite back the artists—Carissa Rodriguez, Virginia Poundstone, Emily Thompson, Tyler Dobson—who have provided a new floral pairing for the works each week, a charming, welcome conceit for a wintertime show.

Bring in the wide-wandering Ei Arakawa’s delirious musical *Paris and Wizard*, put on at MoMA recently. It was a hilarious—maybe even cruel—send-up of curator Barbara London visiting artists in Japan in the early 1970s. The audience became part of the show, Blue Man Group-style.

Some of the art in “2013” should come from shows in new adjoining spaces in Red Hook called Know More Games and 247365 that packed every inch of their modest storefronts with people for their opening nights on Feb. 1. The former had a two-person show with Martin Maher and Win McCarthy, whose meaty hunks of wet clay in plastic were hung, in one instance, by big industrial clamps. Mr. McCarthy makes art with the sophistication of a mud-splattered soccer player, dashing and swerving, gamely dodging opponents.

247365 was filled with work by other emerging talents, like Amy Yao, Lisa Jo and Josh Kline, whose recent work also merits some square footage in “2013.” His show at [47 Canal in late 2011](#) had silicone casts of hands brandishing various objects (an iPhone, a BlackBerry, an Advil bottle), and his display in MoMA PS1’s [“New Pictures of Common Objects”](#) includes a huge wall covered with Patagonia’s Nano Puff fabric. A hallmark of this new work is that the digital and the real get jumbled.

Also dreaming in such liminal space is writer and artist [Tyler Coburn](#), who has been inviting people over to the Google-owned data fortress at 111 Eighth Avenue for performances of a text he has written, which take place alongside a server farm. For 90 minutes, actor Justin Sayre reads an alternately unhinged and razor-sharp text about being an artist and the cloud, about humans disappearing—evolving?—into the networked ether. An on-site specialist gives a tour and answers questions. During the Sandy blackout, he said, the Homeland Security-monitored building’s generators ran on diesel fuel, ensuring that the internet did not fail. It is art as reading and lecture and theater.

“NYC 2013” will not be complete without [K-Hole](#), a brand consultancy of sorts, run by art types who offer a stylish, richly illustrated “trend forecasting report” that advises companies on, say, how to “de-emphasize consumption and instead seek perpetual consumer engagement.”

Also in the part of the show that is devoted to work that ranges beyond art are Tania Bruguera, who has been running an immigrant-support organization in Queens as art, and the redoubtable chefs from places like [Mission Chinese](#), [Do or Dine](#) and, of course, [MoMA PS1’s M. Wells Dinette](#), which push food into realms inventive and adventurous, but never cute or gimmicky.

Thank goodness the New Museum has so much space! Add to this wish list the fearsome nested metal shelving units of [Zak Kitnick](#), the tough but graceful post-minimal work that [Virginia Overton](#) showed at the [Kitchen](#) last year, the moving scatter-art-meets-video installations of [Trisha Baga](#) and the unforgettable—“what in the world are these?”—bubbling glass sculptures, filled with saline solution and contact lenses, that [Anicka Yi](#) offered in SculptureCenter’s [“A Disagreeable Object”](#) last fall. And bring in the hard-slugging sculptor [Andra Ursuta](#). She’s on a tear and would be a shoo-in for “2013” even if she stopped now. Last year, she smashed the front window of her downtown gallery Ramiken Crucible and offered inside sensual marble sculptures of women and some sort of fantastical moon rover. She has also sculpted herself dead as if shot from a catapult.

Other things you would hope to see in “NYC 2033”: apology-free, almost-photorealistic painting by [Caleb Considine](#) (achingly detailed still lifes and portraits that stop short of perfection in various strange ways), the romance-struck paintings of [Van Hanos](#), plus [Mathieu Malouf](#), who’s making gothic paintings filled with mushrooms and spiderwebs, and the full-throated, insanely volumetric paintings of fatty food spreads by [Gina Beavers](#) (disclosure: she organized a show at a now-closed space I ran briefly) that have their precursor in [Llyn Foulkes](#), who is soon to have a retrospective at the (present) New Museum.

We can’t leave out the painters whose work spills into other pursuits. There’s [Joshua Abelow](#)’s rollicking memoir about being a young (and sexually voracious) artist in New York, and [Tom Thayer](#), whose dark paintings, sometimes filled with little puppet-shapes on strings, have become props in abstract plays. (He currently has a show with the great [Dave Miko](#) at [Eleven Rivington](#).)

And don't forget those young painters who are making great strides into abstract territory. There's [Amanda Friedman](#), whose craggy-shaped paintings on paper, shown in painter Eli Ping's tiny basement gallery, were a highlight of the past year. And [Eddie Martinez](#), who, after years of making tough but hilarious and obtuse figure paintings, has pared down his language and gone totally abstract. And [Julia Rommel](#), whose minute monochromes can look gently worn in the way of a prized family heirloom. Like [Carter Mull](#) in a recent essay, I'm skeptical of the current fad for (easily salable) nostalgic dibbity-dab abstract paintings, but there are breakout New Yorkers who are doing exciting things in that mode—[Zak Prekop](#), [Erik Lindman](#) and [Ned Vena](#)—and will be essential for “2013.”

Include young photographers like [Talia Chetrit](#) and [Lucas Blalock](#), and video magicians like [Ed Atkins](#) and [Owen Kydd](#), who force viewers to reconceive of how images are made and remade, how they are seen and re-seen.

But “2013,” the show and the year, is not just about youth. Older artists are au courant. Multigenerational pairings are the thing. [Thomas Kovachevich](#), a retired physician who has been making art for more than 40 years, presents beguiling performances that consist in his making paper dance through heated water; they're humble and elegant. (His long-running art technique just got developed separately, 40 years late, by scientists researching how to make energy using water vapor.) He shows alongside young-ish painters like Sadie Benning and Nicholas Buffon at Callicoon Fine Arts.

Before we're done, a reality check: it's easy to forget that in 1993, many of today's art stars were at the nadir of their careers. Rob Pruitt's 1992 show with collaborator Jack Early at Castelli was pretty much declared racist by critics. Both bided their time and plotted their next moves; Mr. Pruitt bounced back first, but Mr. Early has also been showing around the city recently. There are no doubt artists—known and unknown—who are waiting in the wings and will re-emerge soon with new ideas.

The next time someone starts moaning about the moribund, money-obsessed New York art scene, tell them about some of the terrific shows you've seen recently. In 20 years, some of what is going on right now will be in our city's museums. It's going to be great.

arusseth@observer.com

Update, Feb. 23: An earlier version of this article misstated where the silicon sculptures by Mr. Kline were shown.