

The Highlights - Before-Biennial-After

The first striking thought when sourcing images of work by the artists of the 2010 Whitney Biennial online is how easily understood their process of art making appeared to be. The Biennial's most clear curatorial thread appears to be a conscious move away from high production and fabrication costs that render work slick and impersonal in favor of a homespun tactile brand of making that feels more personal, intimate, and sincere. In addition to this year's positive stats: refreshingly small amount of artists, majority women, etc., most of the work appears to be very direct and in many respects grounded concretely in the realism of the visibly recognized world, as with Jessica Jackson Hutchins's "Couch For A Long Time." It consists of a couch wrapped in newspaper clippings in which crude ceramic vessels sit—though there is little dialogue found between Hutchins's text-and-picture-laden couch and the photos that hang nearby. When abstraction appears, it does so seated traditionally in the method of its making. Narratives appear to be the place where abstraction, complexity, and indeterminacy surface. Richard Aldrich's hunks of wood resting on a pedestal speak to the show's overall accessibility of process and materials, yet slows one down when attempting to interpret intention. Video work is often photographed as an installation, which may give an idea about how the work is viewed but ignores what the work is actually about. Many videos seem to be directly relatable through individual performers engaging in some specific physical activity or feat. Photojournalism is present: Nina Berman's injured Marines, Stephanie Sinclair's mutilated Afghan women. These two stick out as sharp objects, a dose of political reality that seems initially at odds with the unsophisticated inward projections elsewhere—perhaps for the better. Josh Brand's photograms have a material directness and utilize a brand of abstraction that is reminiscent of the early 20th century, similar to Sarah Crowner's gouache painting and Lesley Vance's oil paintings. Charles Ray has a room full of flower drawings that seem to withhold some sort of punch line. Bruce High Quality Foundation's spectacle looks as if it may have been more at home in past biennials. Looking at images of this show online before seeing the actual show creates a very specific feeling that materials and process are more important than the images they create.

Abstraction overall seems to focus on ideas of presentation or image making strategies, i.e. Averbach, Vance, and Quynhman.

Uklunski's piece in the elevator foyer on the 4th floor embodies the entire show. White's piece in the 3rd floor foyer is the opposite.

It appeared to be a couch made out of paper as opposed to simply covered.

Couch is very small

Exceptions: white

Markusper

counting the men in B.H.Q.F.??

Grosvenor: his piece and Hutchins → so much smaller in person than the online pictures make the work appear

Like Kerry Tribe's amazing video installation. Poetic marriage of image and object.

The couch and the Marine photos are very uncomfortable next to each other. The couch took on a completely different meaning once you looked at the surrounding photos. It felt more like a paper mache prosthesis of a couch.

unmemorable

Berman's work appeared to be far more manipulative than Sinclair's.

B.H.Q.F. = Everyone likes a party I guess.

Why haven't I heard more about this piece. (lots of rooms in rooms!)

Alex Hubbard: Best piece in the whole show I instantly thought - I'm not going to see anything I like better than this.

Annotated Plug for an "Invention" 2009 - will text based the more interesting issues concerning virtual space and photoshop

Roland Flexner: Overheard someone say "Journey to the center of the earth".

How do you not dig

Pae White: looks like a "turn any photo into a carpet" ad slogan at a high end home design fair

This untitled piece comprised of three pieces of dumped together knotty pine could have easily been found at a city job site or conversely could be materials extracted from a more personal narrative

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The first striking thought one has after seeing the 2010 Whitney Biennial is how direct and easily understood all of the artist's process of art making is. The Biennial's most clear curatorial thread appears to be a conscious move away from high production and fabrication costs that render work slick and impersonal, in favor of a homespun tactile brand of making that feels more personal, intimate, and sincere. Arriving on the fourth floor one is immediately confronted with this notion as the elevator doors open to reveal Piotr Uklanski's large yarny handmade relief comprised of burlap. There are exceptions to this rule, however, such as Josephine Meckseper's video installation and Pae White's large machine-made textile piece opposite the elevators on the third floor.

Most of the work that has been made by a refreshing demographic of artists, small in number and mostly women, appears to be very direct and in many respects grounded concretely in the realism of the visibly recognized world. Jessica Jackson Hutchins's "Couch For A Long Time" consists of a small couch wrapped in newspaper clippings in which crude ceramic vessels sit. One of the curatorial hiccups is the confused dialogue found between Hutchins's couch and the surrounding photos of a disfigured war vet that feel terribly exploitive. When paintings appear, emphasis seems to be given to strategies of their making as with Tauba Auerbach, R.H. Quaytman, and Lesley Vance. Suzan Frecon's paintings and Josh Brand's photograms share a palette and a brand of abstraction that is reminiscent of the early 20th century. Narratives appear to be the place where abstraction, complexity, and indeterminacy surface. Richard Aldrich's hunks of wood resting on a pedestal speak to the show's overall accessibility of process and materials, yet slows one down when attempting to interpret intention. This untitled clump comprised of three pieces of knotty pine could have easily been found at a city job site or, conversely, extracted from a more personal narrative. Video work is often photographed as an installation, which may give an idea about how the work is viewed but ignores what the work is actually about. Videos by Jesse Aron Green, Kate Gilmore, Kelly Nipper, and Rashaad Newsome isolate performers engaged in a specific physical activity or feat without the drama of a set or knowable environment. Alex Hubbard's video "Annotated Plans for an Evacuation" is an analogue translation of Photoshop and animation techniques executed on a car in a parking lot, and is perhaps the best piece in the show. Photojournalism is present with Nina Berman's injured Marines and Stephanie Sinclair's mutilated Afghan women. These two stick out as sharp objects, a dose of political reality that seems initially at odds with the unsophisticated inward projections elsewhere—perhaps for the better. Charles Ray has a private room full of flower drawings that seem to withhold some sort of punch line and don't really justify such a large space. Bruce High Quality Foundation's spectacle looks as if it may have been more at home in past biennials. Overall the Biennial's concise curation yielded only a few missteps. Connections are evident between artists across media and concept, and the importance of materials and process over the images they create echo as these artist's primary preoccupation.

The following is a critical perspective in three parts: first written entirely before seeing the Biennial; then with notes, corrections, and redactions that occurred immediately after seeing the show; followed by a final revision.