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BOMBLOG

Greater New York Roundtable: Franklin Evans and Sam Moyer

by Richard J. Goldstein
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Sam Moyer, Greater New York 2010 installation shot at P.S.1.

In just 10 years, MoMA P.S.1 has invited some 376 artists to participate in its Greater New York exhibitions, and that's just with three shows between 2000 and 2010. With a little more time between shows than the biennial, this quinquennial offers a chance for new artists, approaches, and attitudes in all media to transpire. Looking back at the shows over the decade, one can see these changes within the New York art community. Though, one thing remains constant and that is the energy and level of inquiry the artists ground their work upon—installed throughout this one-time school, a sense of science fair enthusiasm echoes down the halls. Franklin Evans and Sam Moyer, two participating artists in the 2010 group, both agreed to participate in an ongoing email dialogue about the exhibition. The contrasts between their work couldn't be more striking—Evans's colorful and cumulative installations exploding with texture and Moyer's black and bleached prints on panels with all texture relegated to the surface—but the casual elegance of

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both their works has the ability to totally absorb the viewer. They relate their involvement with an exhibition of this scale and give insight into the position of the often mythologized New York artist today.

Richard Goldstein What did you think of the show?

Franklin Evans I was impressed by the space that the curators generally allotted to each of the artists and by their curatorial decisions to emphasize process/performance-oriented work in this exhibition. Clearly like in any survey exhibition, many vibrant voices are somewhat ignored (painting), but I absolutely respect the choices of the curators not to dilute their idea by presenting an all-inclusive sampling of all media. Moreover, I like the idea of bringing in other voices via the rotating gallery exhibitions in the drawing gallery, which can allow for alternative ideas regarding what is most relevant and interesting now. Finally, there were several delights for me to discover in my initial and return visits to the show.

Sam Moyer The show mimics/mirrors a sense of the experience of New York, the living breathing thing for me. There are parts that are dark and fun, hidden behaviors, interruptive and interactive noise, things I want to avoid (but I'm glad I know they are there), spots I want to return to again and visual moments that stick with me. I am speaking generally, but there is an experiential blanketing effect that works for me. When I walk people through there for the first time they have a "what just happened..." mind set, but over time it wears off and they start to list particular things that struck them. Most "out of towners" are *fascinated*. That seems successful to me.

RG How did you go about making the selections for the show?

FE Klaus [Biesenbach], Connie [Butler], and Neville [Wakefield] offered me time to develop a new installation in a single room. They recognized that time was one of the subjects in the painting/installation language that I have been exploring over the past couple of years, and they suggested that I consider an installation in the spirit of this process-oriented exploration. I was excited to have a contained space (single room) in which to develop and reinvestigate processes that were both familiar and unfamiliar.

SM Well, that was hard for me. Nothing in particular was asked of me other than hearing through the grape vine that Connie would like some drawings in there. So, I made a little proposal...and then waited...

So in waiting I just started working and ended up with a smaller version of the piece I originally proposed, two drawings and a 36-foot sculpture that I kind of sprung on the curators. It all felt very up in the air until it was in the room, and then all of a sudden was very deliberate.

RG What do the pieces say about your practice as a whole?

FE *Timecompressionmachine* embodies my two year investigation that allows for a democratization of object and process. It has a relationship with many past practices, but aligned with the privileging of the individual, it is both my discarded material and my object investigation. It is the fullest installation I have done to date in contrast to recent past exhibitions whereby the processes were more discrete and less consciously intertwined.

SM The installation is a sampling of the different materials and systems I work with, but the goal was to show the crossover of themes and visual language that they share.

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The objects I produce can appear very physically disparate but are always approached with the same set of concerns and motives. A large part of my practice is returning some power to the materials, defying their natural or intended use, highlighting their actual nature. Taking away a little control of the hand in the hand made. The list of themes goes on and on, but I feel like I was allowed a nice platform to show a body of work that represents my practice as a whole with pieces that are germane to each other.

RG Scale has always been an important subject of art. What does the exhibition say about the scale of our generation and of our generation's work?

FE I am not sure what you are getting at with this question...Are we the Make It Bigger Generation? I think we are past that (possibly linked to recent economic decline). GNY gave each artist essentially a single room (as did the Whitney) and yet in both cases, most of the work did not seem to be about making it big or small. Nothing felt like Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, or even the maquette for Jeff Koons' *LACMA Train*. The recent economic past may be a harbinger of what's to come (slow decline of economic hubris and transition to more moderate lifestyles) and in ways it may be seen in some of the GNY work. Matt Hoyt's strange work wonderfully relates (and more than just this) to what I suggest as the current social attitude digesting the socioeconomic decline of America.

SM The scale of our generation...as in the amount of people? This question is tricky for me. It makes me think about scale in a sense of importance for some reason. How important is our generation's work? How many people does it reach? Do we make big things or small things? I think that scale is played with in very interesting ways throughout the show. There are sound pieces that take up huge amounts of space, and video pieces when looped take up infinite amounts of time. Mariah Robertson's photo on an entire roll of paper is defined by scale, a lot of the work is, including my own. I think the show is visually well balanced. I agree with Franklin that some of the smaller pieces take up the most space.

RG In terms of scale, I guess I wasn't as specific as I could be with that one...But I was thinking in terms of numbers, like there are so many artists today whereas in the '50s it was noted that the New York art scene was very small, just a handful. Though, there probably were plenty more people making work off the radar toiling away—perhaps the critics' definition of the scene was very narrow and exclusive then. Maybe today the scale of the scene is a lot bigger and less elite. The Internet increases the scale, everyone's in the pool and that's something specific to this time I guess. And that changes looking; where to look? Things may be less competitive now because there are more opportunities for artists, more galleries, and more alternative ways to get the work out there.

SM I think there is a generation of artists right ahead of me—I'm 27, so let's say 34–45-ish—that were able to saddle up on this incredible boom in the art market. It came in stride for a lot of them, and some just grazed the tail end, but they really showed that it was possible to make a life out of this. It's hard and competitive, but possible. Then once the market crashed all the kids that were waiting around for their turn didn't just give up. They started amazing DIY things, like Apartment Show. Of course the Internet and accessibility and the rejection of the idealized "artist" has broadened the field immensely. Anything goes. In the '50s, photography was barely considered art.

Plus, there is a slower maturation in a lot of ways now. We might know more and be more worldly than our parents were, but we don't have the same get married, get a mortgage, have a baby pressure that they did. We get to stay flexible longer, and that combined with being raised on ideas of being anything we want to be is a recipe for a lot of people doing what they want. Which

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fills the artist quota pretty fast. There are companies like the 3rd Ward in Bushwick that basically created a “how to be a NY artist” kit, that includes laptops, bikes, studio space, and lessons on how to build a loft. There is an infrastructure laid out that makes the whole thing more approachable and fathomable.

RG Sam mentioned a “blanketing effect” in one of her responses. A similar feeling came over me at the Armory show, but here there is a strong curatorial undercurrent. Is this blanketing something unique to our time? How does this shape work being made now?

FE I don’t have the same blanketing experience with GNY, certainly not to the extent that I recently had in watching Chantal Akerman’s *La Chambre* where the camera is in repeated 360 degree rotation of a room. On the first pass, I was unclear of the specificity of visual and structural arrangement. My initial experience with GNY (which was a rather cursory view of the show) led to an immediate understanding of what I was seeing and a clear impression of what I wanted specifically to explore further. I was later pleasantly surprised that some of what I had dismissed was far more rewarding than my quick dismissal had allowed for. I don’t think that what I understand Sam describing as “blanketing” to be specific to this show or to our time. It could and does happen now (Sam) and at other times (my experience with 1970s Akerman).

SM I didn’t intend for the “blanketing effect” to sound like a suggestion of doldrum-ness, more of an overarching understanding. Even though the works are all very different there is an overall thread that links everything, making the show feel connected. I also finished that statement by saying that after the overwhelming feelings of having seen so many different things at once passes, specifics start to pop up. It is the kind of exhibition I need to go back to a couple of times. As far as “blanketing effects” in general, the thing I was getting at is that you don’t want to fall into the trend and be pigeonholed or disregarded as another little fish in whatever movement is being defined. You don’t want to get *stuck* under the blanket.

Art fairs are not museum shows, they are not trying to do anything as a uniformed group other than have a successful art fair. The “blanketing effect” there, for me, is just seeing cubicle after cubicle of people trying to build the same house with a different set of tools.

RG The New York artist is often championed and maligned, ironic and sincere, naive and clever—an urban legend, that has evolved over time. What kind of picture does the show make of a New York artist now?

FE NY Artist Now: Championed and Maligned—YES; Ironic and Sincere—YES; an Urban Legend still evolving—YES; AND more (ambitious, obsessive, multi-media focused, interested in conceptual reconsideration of the past, process-oriented, mostly reaching outside the exclusivity of the studio, professional and career attentive).

SM I hope it shows that we are hard workers. That’s what defines a New York artist for me. You have to work harder here than you would anywhere else. But that’s what makes it good.

RG What makes GNY different than other contemporary youth-centric exhibitions like the Whitney Biennial and the New Museum’s *Younger than Jesus*?

FE GNY is more geographically focused, slightly less youth-centric than the age-specific 33 of *Younger than Jesus*, but since it is about emerging art, it too is youngish. Whitney seems to have much less interest in age than in defining what the selected curator champions from the recent past nationally and sometimes beyond. GNY allows for a wider period in which to assess

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emerging work or work of import (past five years), but it still feels weighted toward the more recent past (past year or two) similar to a Whitney Biennial.

SM The community factor is the separation for me. The specificity of place creating the playing field. I like that New York plays a neutral and aggressive role in the creation of the show. We all have that in common. I guess being under 33 is something to have in common...but age is sly, a location is fact.

RG Emerging isn't really the word that best locates your careers, perhaps rising...If GNY marks your career at a beginning, what is the destination for you?

FE It seems like the horizon interminably pushes further into the distance as we pass markers that used to define that horizon. I plan/hope to be in New York for many years to come.

SM To work until I can't work anymore. (cross fingers, knock on wood) I'm too superstitious to say.

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