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Local Talent Leads Downtown Triennial



By KIMBERLY CHOU

For the New Museum's forthcoming triennial, "The Ungovernables," curator Eungie Joo spent two years visiting studios around the world, meeting artists from Buenos Aires to Hong Kong, Cairo to Harare. Out of the 34 artists and artist groups she eventually invited for the nine-week exhibition, which opens Feb. 15, four are based here in the city. Here's a look at who they are and what they do.

Dave McKenzie

Mr. McKenzie has danced without music for hours; performed with a microphone in his mouth and the cord around his neck; and posted hundreds of on-location notices around the Lower East Side, alerting neighbors of a film production but of the artist himself.

Artist Dave McKenzie performs at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2007.

"In my work I've made really up-front projects, where my body is very much in question or the image of me is very much visible," said Mr. McKenzie, 34, who has lived in



New York since 2001. "Then there's more recent work that's without me, so there isn't that clear frame or reference."

He said he finds the latter, more "open-ended" work especially challenging, because he isn't physically present. His contribution to "The Ungovernables" is a table with "a few objects on it that recall a book, a book structure, things placed in a book." He was inspired, in part, by a book that had been mysteriously left in the office he moved into at Northwestern University late last year: "1,999 Facts About Blacks: A Sourcebook of African-American Achievement."



Figure 1 Azikiwe Mohammed

Trying to figure out the book—where did it come from? Why was it there?—and trying to locate himself within it led to a reading of "a book within a book," he said. "That's sort of how the table functions for me."

The table, whose complete meaning is unclear even to the artist, is emblematic of his recent body of work. "Almost from the get-go I'm unsure, and the uncertainty grows," Mr. McKenzie said. "It's an interesting complex for me, but I don't always feel grounded. This [table sculpture] functions between abstraction and representation, and trying to find myself within it."

Julia Dault

For her site-specific sculptures, Ms. Dault, 34, wrestles sheets of mirrored Plexiglas, Formica and tambour into fat curves and cylinders, securing them with cotton cord and boxing wraps. She does everything herself, in prescribed time frames: the titles of her sculptures include a time stamp of the period of time and the day she made it.



"In the back of my mind is always, 'I have to stay fit to be able to do this,' because it's so physical," said Ms. Dault, who lives in Sunset Park.

Physicality is key to her practice. Her work in sculpture and painting considers how to make art that recognizes the influence of minimalism and abstract expressionism, but made relevant for today.

"For me it's not phoning in and having someone else do it," she said. "[It's about] still being present, still having a laboring body, still being engaged as a maker."

She often acquires her materials from salvage yards, or in craft or supply stores near where she is installing. Locally, that has included Build it Green! NYC, a salvage yard in Astoria; Canal Plastics Center in Chinatown, near the New Museum; and a New Jersey thrift store where she found a Duratrans billboard for the 50 Cent single "Wanksta," which became the canvas for a painting

Bob Goedewaagen Ms. Dault's 'Untitled 17 (11:00 am - 4:00 pm, January 20, 2011)' (2011).



LaToya Ruby Frazier. Ms. DeVille's 'What Happens to a Dream Deferred...Supernova' (2009)

Abigail DeVille

Ms. DeVille's work is fueled by anger.

"I think constantly feeding on certain social injustices is always a good source of getting that fire going and inspiring me to make something that could respond to that problem," said Ms. DeVille, 30, who grew up in and still lives and works in the Bronx.

Ms. DeVille's responses come in the form of big, sprawling sculptures populated with materials scavenged from her grandmother's apartment (refrigerator magnets, lottery tickets, carpets) and

from the streets (televisions, mattresses).

Her work in "The Ungovernables" overtakes a vaulted vent space between the museum's third-floor and fourth-floor galleries. Domestic objects hang from a collapsing grid painted on the ceiling, dangling nine feet above the gallery floor. Ms. DeVille was inspired after recently seeing "Dark Days," a 2000 documentary about people who live in the Amtrak tunnels beneath Penn Station. She saw a show of Jacob Riis photographs around the same time and realized that "the same exact interiors of these derelict spaces of 100 years ago were mirror images of the way people were living here in the late '90s and the way people were living here until the present day."

The New Museum's location on the ever-gentrifying Bowery, and near the Bowery Mission, also informed her work.

"[Homelessness and poverty] is an ongoing problem that's not getting any better. It's glossed over and pushed aside," she said. "I use black holes as a metaphor for historical erasure: Since black holes are filled with things you can't ever see, it's sort of a 30-foot black hole of problems that are right in front of your face that you choose to ignore."



Daniella Zalcman for The Wall Street Journal

Julia Dault and Abigail DeVille, two of the local artists included in the 'The Ungovernables,' at the New Museum

Iman Issa

Born in Cairo, Ms. Issa, 32, divides her time between that city and Brooklyn. Her work in "The Ungovernables" comprises four parts in a series of 10 displays that present alternative models to existing monuments in the world. (One of the works here was previously shown; the other three are new.)



[Serkan Taycan](#)

Iman Issa's 'Material for a sculpture proposed as an alternative to a monument that has become an embarrassment to its people' (2011)

The work, as Ms. Issa described it, explores how monuments work, in terms of formal limits and the messages meant to be conveyed. "[With a] loaded political event, how do you formalize that

aesthetically?" she said.

The monuments and memorials Ms. Issa addresses are ones she grew up with. Specific sites are never mentioned, though each sculpture is accompanied by a wall text that reads, for example, "Material for a sculpture proposed as an alternative to a monument that has become an embarrassment to its people." That work consists of two lightbulbs on a wooden table; when one lights up, the other dims, and vice versa.

While her alternative models are inspired by real-life objects, Ms. Issa is firm about not revealing what they are, nor does she intend for viewers to guess.

"I don't really like to say exactly what they are," she said. "It has become kind of irrelevant for me, and it became more about the possibility. When you say the name of a figure or the date of an event, it became a less adequate way of recalling an event. These general descriptions that I came up with became better at evoking figures or events."