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A Rising Generation of Artistic Resistance

By CAROL VOGEL



Nearly three years ago they were “Younger Than Jesus.” Now that generation of emerging artists (born between the mid-1970s and the mid-’80s) is being called “The Ungovernables,” at least by curators at the New Museum, organizing its second Triennial.



“I wanted a title that has more than one side,” said Eungie Joo, the New Museum’s director and curator of education and public programs, who has organized the 2012 Triennial. “It’s a term inspired by the 1976 student uprisings in South Africa,” Ms. Joo said. “It could be defined as chaotic or anarchic, but it could also refer to an organized resistance.” The word ungovernable came to define an official strategy of the African National Congress in 1986, she added.

The exhibition will run from Feb. 15 to April 22. It will take up the museum’s entire building, on the Bowery between Stanton and Rivington Streets on the Lower East Side, and include more than 50 participants, or about 34 artists, artist groups and temporary collectives.

The show is a result of two years, hundreds of studio visits and travel to more than 20 countries. “I wanted to go places where there is an international cultural scene,” Ms. Joo said. In her journeys — to Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Stockholm and other cities — some common threads appeared, including


issues of economic turbulence and political commentary. “The subtlety of the work is important,” Ms. Joo said. “There is no overt or confrontational agenda, but rather these artists are making comments that are of their time in a particularly pragmatic way.”

Lisa Phillips, director of the New Museum, said that many of the recent biennials in places like Shanghai and São Paulo have had an international influence on art and by extension on the Triennial. “While these artists are deeply sensitive to the political landscape, we’re not seeing the kind of strident doctrinaire views that we’ve seen in previous generations,” she said

In addition to installations, videos and conceptual pieces — the most popular art forms for this generation — there will be more traditional paintings, drawings and sculptures.

Drawings, Ms. Joo said, will be present more than is usually the case in sprawling survey shows. Rita Ponce de León, a Peruvian who lives and works in Mexico City, for instance, will be showing about 120 tiny ink drawings. The drawings depict dreams and memories from some of her friends and family.

Iman Issa, an Egyptian-born artist living in Cairo and New York, has created a series of sculptures that are about the essence of monuments. The Vietnamese-born Danh Vo, who works in Berlin, is also thinking about monuments, but in a different way. When he learned that the Statue of Liberty was simply a steel armature covered by a copper skin the thickness of two pennies, he researched the hammering process that gave her shape, then employed craftsmen to replicate the statue’s skin for his work “We the People.”

“It’s really about what those monuments have come to represent,” Ms. Joo said, “and the way their meanings change over time.” 

A MANET FOR THE GETTY

When Manet showed a woman known only as Madame Brunet a portrait he had painted of her, she reportedly burst into tears and “left the studio with her husband, never wanting to see the portrait again,” according to Théodore Duret, a French art critic of the time. So the artist kept the portrait for two decades, until his death in 1883.

As distasteful as the likeness was to the sitter, officials at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles had quite the opposite reaction. The painting is their latest acquisition and an important one, said Scott Schaefer, senior curator of paintings at the Getty, because until now the museum had had only one Manet, and it was a later work, from 1878, an urban