

Burning Police Car, Anyone?

Three predictions about the near future of art. (Sorry, Larry...) BY CHRISTIAN VIVEROS #ALINE



Art

Let's begin by admitting the obvious. Art critics—like pessimists, accountants, and property developers—have no business making predictions their mouths can't cash. Yet there are periods that appear to be mixed-up, so perplexingly frustrating and hopeful, that trying to get a jump on events seems only reasonable. This coming year, I would argue, is one of those veering crossroads. "Never make forecasts, especially about the future," fumed Goldwyn said. Provided you know some stuff, though, one can make a few, ahem, timely guesses. (I've got three!)

PREDICTION #1
The Rise of the Aesthetics of Decline
New Powers, Broken 2.0, The New Social
 Whatever you want to call it, the new global art movement signals the start of a hugely salutary if still uncertain fusion of ethics and aesthetics. An international mix of art and activism across various media, this new current often goes out on a limb to score political points. Witness Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's ongoing *Immigrant Moves*

project—an actual incorporated political party—being "performed" throughout 2012, somewhere in Ottawa, Quebec.

Although artists have been representing social inquiries since way before Bonare Bearden collaged views of Harlem in the 1970s (the artist's centennial exhibition continues at the Studio Museum until September 2), this genuinely new kind of practice promises far more hands-on civic engagement. Local procurers include New York's John Ahearn (whose plaster casts of his Bronx neighbors have proved provocative public sculptures) and the AIDS-era radical *Gran Fury*. (Their combative survey opens January 31 at NYU's 80 Washington Square East Galleries.)

But the phenomenon's most urgent exemplars today reside far outside the five boroughs. While the majority of New York artists now scratch their heads about unpaid T-Mobile bills and the depressing reality of a crap economy, Al Weiss risks his neck for free speech in Beijing, and the Moscow art collective *Voyna* fights court battles to defend their trashing of

PREDICTION #2
The Gothamization of the Global
 This second prediction begins where my first forecast ends. If you can't (or won't) make the art yourself, have it delivered. Like Chinese takeout. That is the New York way. The aesthetic sustenance I speak of is not the usual limp chow mein, but rather political hot potatoes, shipped in fresh for the New Museum's much-anticipated second youth triennial. (It opens February 15.)

Titled "The Ungovernables," in the manner of a Jerry Bruckheimer shoot-'em-up (the term was used fearfully by South Africa's apartheid government, then adopted later as badge of honor by the African National Congress), the exhibition features the work of foreign-born artists reflecting critically on societies with much bigger problems than 8.5 percent unemployment. Unlike their American cousins, this geographically scattered bunch grew up amid (I'm quoting from the press release) "military dictatorships," "IMF crises," and "the spread of global capitalism and the rise of fundamentalism." That the show's 50-plus artists were

'80s makes their age cohort slightly more mature than the museum's last youthennial, the fact that they hail from so-called hardship countries including Nigeria, Vietnam, and India suggests that their art will be both more pragmatic and solidly confrontational. A Great Recession primer on art attuned to social issues, the exhibition will likely also prove a huge improvement on this year's star-humping Whitney Biennial. (That show, which includes movie kinfolk Werner Herzog, Frederick Wiseman, and Vincent Gallo, opens March 1.) For the coming cage fight, I give you the tale of the tape: "The Ungovernables" presents fresh global perspectives on crucial political and artistic issues; the Whitney plumps celebrity blowjobs (Gallo) and retreads "institutional critique" (Occupy Artists Space's Georgia Sagri). *Lay your bets, ladies and gentlemen. Lay your bets.*

PREDICTION #3
The Dimming of the "Business Art" Supernova

There's no way to put this too bluntly: During the past three decades, experimental in downtown New York (and also in London, Paris, Tokyo, et al.) has largely been about creating exotic financial instruments. Starting with Andy Warhol's campy come-age—"the best kind of art is business art"—the top tier of the art world has effectively shifted into a mind-blowing market. Artists like Damien Hirst (I think by now you all know where he's showing), gather 'round such as Larry Gopstein (I think by now you all know what he's showing), and New York collector like Jose Magnin (he's vaguely showing Warhol and Hirst inside

just warehouses 24/7. There is a cold, nasty Donald Trump-like art to the deal. Most in their medium.

But wait, here's the kicker: Here's the real news in a nutshell: In the space of

30 years, Bart's wintered up the most detestable aspects of Lehman Bros.—single leavering. The age of the SWAG bubble (Silver, Wine, Art, and Gold) is now upon us. If we believe the experts, it will soon pass (or is that pop?) Good riddance, I say. If this pack of mixed thistles and rubber barons is still around in 2012 (and God knows they have the web to ship in that time itself), it might be smart to ship in that *Voyna* crew from Moscow.

As the journalist Kathleen Massara recently pointed out, we've entered the nightmare scenario Robert Hughes warned us about in *Nothing if Not Critical*. A slice of the art world has gone, body and soul, for "the strategies of other mass media," divorcing the "emphasis on spectacle, cult of celebrity, the whole mania-obsession-and-obsession syndrome." That group's recession-busting logic is Sorogee-simple: Greed is good, art and artists are products, only sales measure artistic worth. But there's another, stankier Dickensian world out there. "Art, like morality," wrote G.K. Chesterton, "consists in drawing the line somewhere." It's time to draw the line somewhere. It's time to draw the line between the real world and the

PREDICTIONS

The Gothamization of the Global
 This second prediction begins where my first forecast ends. If you can't (or won't) make the art yourself, have it delivered, like Chinese takeout. *That is the New York way*. The aesthetic sustenance I speak of is not the usual limp chow mein, but rather political hot potatoes, shipped in fresh for the New Museum's much-anticipated second youth triennial. (It opens February 15.)

Titled "The Ungovernables," in the manner of a Jerry Bruckheimer shoot-'em-up (the term was used fearfully by South Africa's apartheid government, then adopted later as badge of honor by the African National Congress), the exhibition features the work of foreign-born artists reflecting critically on societies with much bigger problems than 8.5 percent unemployment. Unlike their American cousins, this geographically scattered bunch grew up amid (I'm quoting from the press release) "military dictatorships," "TMF crises," and "the spread of global capitalism and the rise of fundamentalism." That the show's 50-plus artists were born between the mid 1970s and the mid '80s makes their age cohort slightly more mature than the museum's last youthennial; the fact that they hail from so-called hardship countries including Nigeria, Vietnam, and India suggests that their art will be both more pragmatic and solidly confrontational. A Great Recession primer on art attuned to social issues, the exhibition will likely also prove a huge improvement on this year's star-humping Whitney Biennial. (That show, which includes movie kinfolk Werner Herzog, Frederick Wiseman, and Vincent Gallo, opens March 1.) For the coming cage fight, I give you the tale of the tape: "The Ungovernables" presents fresh global perspectives on crucial political and artistic issues; the Whitney plumps celebrity blowjobs (Gallo) and retreads "institutional critique" (Occupy Artists Space's Georgia Sagri). *Lay your bets, ladies and gentlemen. Lay your bets.*