

Where everyone's a curator

By Stephanie Murg



Installation view of "The Most Curatorial Biennial of the Universe," which runs through August 11 at apexart.

For the international art world, the stars have aligned in Europe—in more ways than one. Calendrical coincidence has made the summer of 2007 a blockbuster for the world's leading art fairs, with Art Basel in Switzerland, the 52nd Venice Biennale, Documenta XII (which takes place every five years), and Sculpture Projects Munster (held once a decade) opening within weeks of each other. But one need not even journey above 14th Street to take in The Most Curatorial Biennial of the Universe. It's right here in Lower Manhattan, and you might even know one of the curators—there are 217 of them.

The open call went out earlier this year when the not-for-profit organization apexart invited curators, defined as "artists, writers, or anyone so inclined," to submit two works by two different artists for an exhibition that would aim to address "two pervasive issues of our time": biennialesness and poverty. Now anyone, whether or not he or she has ever dreamed of headlining the American Pavilion in Venice, could participate in that rarified form of art fair. All accepted works would be available for purchase, with funds going to New York City's Robin Hood Foundation. How did apexart propose to control the scope of this project? By requiring that each work be no larger than 8" x 10".

The resulting exhibition, on view at apexart (and online at www.apexart.org) through August 11, excites the eye and mind like a vast flea market or an overwhelming outlet store that has just received a fresh delivery. It's up to the visitor to find the treasures—and then bid to take them home.

While Documenta is guided by the theme of “utopia and its violent end” and artistic director Robert Storr has organized the Venice Biennale around the theme of “Think with the Senses—Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense,” The Most Curatorial Biennial of the Universe offers utopia, dystopia, past, present, future, and everything in between—in doses that never exceed the size of a sheet of looseleaf paper.

As one might expect, the 355 works on view are dizzyingly diverse in subject matter and approach, and each work takes on added dimension when viewed alongside the work with which it was submitted. This makes for some fascinating visual juxtapositions. Curator Kevin Regan submitted two works that share a pop palette and rhythm that are reminiscent of the work of Jeff Koons. Brian Gabora's brightly colored painting of swirling geometric ropes that resemble flattened DNA strands or Lego toys of the future (current bid: \$20) are a perfect foil for Donna Kozloskie's image of a reclining pin-up girl overlaid with a photo of a dolphin (also now selling for \$20).

The other extreme is exemplified by curator Jill Cook, who submitted two very different works. A drawing by Graham Heffernan shows chunky black rectangles being maneuvered by wavy lines (current bid: \$20). This is contrasted with Cook's other submission, a gritty yet warm-toned photo by Sara DeCesare that captures tattered curtains flapping in a breeze from an open, unseen window or perhaps the old radiator that is visible at the bottom of the frame (current bid: \$30).

Other works on view are reminiscent of the ongoing PostSecret project, which offers glimpses into the minds of others through anonymous homemade postcards mailed to Frank Warren, the project's creator. In the middle of Molly Roth's doodly ink work at apexart is scrawled the curiously Jenny Holzer-like message: “Like a racehorse in a world without racetracks” (current bid: \$10).

Rising art stars are also among the artists represented. From curator Diane Kingsley comes Oona Stern's rendering of a latticework that could be an architecturally-planned pie crust (current bid: \$30). Stern is known for her fascination with surfaces. Last year, as part of an Art in General commission, she paved a swath of the new Bloomberg headquarters in a green carpet whose irregular edges made it appear alive and growing. Also from Kingsley is artist Donna Nield's forest of red trees silhouetted on a pure, white ground (current bid: \$90).

In March, Robert Storr commented on his curatorial concept for the current Venice Biennale and the occasional futility of trying to make any sense of things at a given moment. An alternative, he suggested, is “making nonsense,” a process that The Most Curatorial Biennial proves is just as valid—and often much more fun.