

# the VOICE Art

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## The Buoy of Summer

From across the big city, three shows to help lift your museum malaise



BY CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNE

A shadow of anxiety has crossed the smiling, placid face of museum culture in New York. Despite the milestone of having added the medium of performance to the art-world canon—in the guise of work by Marina Abramovic and Tino Sehgal—recent surveys at the New Museum, the Whitney, and MOMA/P.S.1 reveal a crisis among the city's curatorial class. Torn between increased fund-raising responsibilities and the dwindling returns of "paradigms" contained in *The Postmodernism Reader*, this priestly bunch lost the plot of contemporary art. When they might regain their course is anyone's guess—sometime before the next Youthennial, though, would not be a minute too soon.

This development raises a crucial question: Where, if not in serial museum exhibitions of young art, is it possible to view examples of challenging new work in Gotham? One sure-fire way is to trade New York's institutions for its spryer neighborhood galleries. Filled to the brim with art of every stripe, these spaces present novelty and newness way before curators get to it.

A thrasher of talent more than 500 spaces strong, New York's legendary gallery scene makes all other world-class art metropolises look like Lilliput. Even if expensive rents, onerous visa requirements, and cheap airfare mean artists sometimes prefer to make work in cities like Berlin, Vienna, or Mexico City, New York—besides being art's international marketplace—remains firmly at the vanguard of what are, unfailingly, the globe's most important cultural developments. As David Letterman put it: "When civilization falls apart, remember: We Were way ahead of you."

Smart dealers traditionally reserve June for challenging group shows or market-confounding labors of love. Three New York exhibitions currently on view merit special attention for folks hungry for the opposite of limply hip, joinerish museum fare. Iconoclastic displays, these efforts feature newly minted contemporary art with a yen for standing out, rather than merely fitting in.

Firmly in the labor-of-love camp is James Hyde's group of billboard-size paintings at the Boiler, Pierogi gallery's cavernous project space in Williamsburg. Hyde—a 51-year-old veteran of countless gallery and museum outings—exhibits greater youthfulness in his five enormous paintings than several MFA graduate shows roped together. Channeling verve in extra-large portions, his works manage the perfect burly antidote to the current vogue for pusillanimous art made with mix-and-match media.

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A third exhibition on view this month is simply one of the best solo gallery outings in New York all year: 34-year-old Richard Hughes's accumulation of painstakingly constructed ruins of teen nostalgia, at Anton Kern in Chelsea. A Brit sculptor of trick-the-eye tableaux that repeatedly ask the real vs. counterfeit stumper, his newly built post-industrial theme park for skate punks presents cast and painted versions of several neighborhoods' worth of blighted stuff.

Hughes's take on a teener *Twilight Zone* includes several dozen facsimiles of shoefiti (sneakers flung atop utility wires), two rusted Victorian lampposts (with gouged soccer-ball skulls for heads), a doorway

boarded up with a resin version of plywood, a 30-foot-long poster wall dotted with blue tack (each lump contains the artist's thumbprint), a boy's decal-laden window morphed into a churchy vitral (this complex piece deserves its own article), and a fake derelict building foundation whose hidden message sums up everything there is to say about youthful trespassing and surviving adolescence—the words "THE END." spelled out in bits of carpeting, linoleum, wood, and plaster (the period is courtesy of a toilet hole).

Because Hughes knows there's nothing more conservative than youth culture, his meticulous sculptures are deliberately at odds with their pubescent subject matter. If you look hard enough at his work, his "THE END." might point directly at a grown-up beginning.