

CURRENTS 2010

Art with a capitalist A bubbled and burst in conjunction with real estate and Wall Street late in 2008 to help kick off the Great Recession. Remember when Damien Hirst took his wares to market for something like 200 million bucks just as the New York Stock Exchange went into free fall? After a decade of auction houses pimping up the prices of “contemporary artists” it was time for the big corporate war and petrol profiteers and hedge fund managers to board the inspired investment vehicles that would carry them and their wealth into the paradise they’ve planned. Life is short. But investing in Art is long, and what better place for your ill-gotten capital during the severe and lasting downturn you’ve created?

Western Art’s ties to power and wealth are nothing new, and the idea that Art is something essentially aristocratic has long been a part of Western colonialism. Though of course the term we use today is globalism. It’s a conceptual connection we export alongside weaponry, war, corporate irresponsibility, and the systematic extermination of non-Western cultures and traditions. But after the Rococo comes the French Revolution. The great thing about the wealthy sticking their noses so far up their own asses is that alternatives to the systems they’ve come to dominate (like Art today) develop necessarily. The desire to see good work remains, and desires exist to be filled. Some loser will be left with a leaky formaldehyde vitrine and rotten shark carcass while real art will continue to happen elsewhere.

We got a good look at this principle in practice this summer in Santa Fe when *Currents 2010*, a homegrown video extravaganza, utterly dissolved in its resounding wake the underwhelming and irrelevant SITE Santa Fe “video” Biennial. SITE has long been perceived as elitist, and despite their

best intentions (they are, for example, listed as sponsors for *Currents 2010*) they can’t seem to shake this image. Putting Robert Storr’s grad students in charge of curation doesn’t exactly help to dispel this perception.

Mariannah Amster, Frank Ragano, and Paul Marcus—who refer to themselves as producers rather than curators for *Currents 2010*—employed for their show the democratizing powers of twenty-first century technology. First they gathered their video-artist friends, regulars in the Santa Fe Currents group formed in 2002, and then put out an open call via the Internet, and managed on a shoestring to assemble a video show of both local and international scope—with many works of outstandingly wondrous beauty and intrigue by artists who (largely) haven’t had their creativity hyper-commodified, including an ample handful of budding high school kids. They didn’t pay any over-hyped architects to overcharge them for scrims and screens, and with the artists pitching in they created a new media space of remarkable sociability and interaction, as they’ve done on a lesser scale in the recent past at Salon Mar Graff and the Santa Fe Complex.

One of the strong points of the show was that nearly all the artists considered the physical presence of their pieces as sculpture and not just as screens. Robert Campbell’s *Yellow* installation was most notable in this regard as it used five separate videos projected onto translucent sculptures and relief surfaces to create a fascinating, totalizing installation of moving light and color. Video teamsters Susanna Carlisle and Bruce Hamilton took a similar approach by hanging glass baubles filled with various substances in front of the two angled screens upon which their bright, abstracted moving images played. Robert Drummond’s *Emotion Anamorphic* and

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Lenka Novakova’s *The River is a Mirror* employed distortion and refraction, respectively, to alter the projected images. This concept of the “video object” as opposed to a narrative “movie” may indeed be what Santa Fe videographers do best.

A favorite for viewer interactivity was Albuquerque’s Dr. Woohoo! and Aric Grauke’s piece which graced a long wall of the entry hall with a series of constantly morphing abstract flower/sea anemone-type forms that would chase and cluster around viewers who stepped in the interactive zone of motion sensors. Using open source software, Dr. Woohoo! promotes artistic and digitally democratic processes that are as inspiring as they are inspired. Other standouts included Marion Wasserman’s gorgeous *Elephant Memory*, projected on the down low and reflected in a pool of water; and the team of Steina, Woody Vasulka, and Rob Shaw, whose untitled piece allowed you to glimpse your own head as a continuously spinning series of bizarre planetary topologies. Hisao Ihara contributed a three-channel video projection of pure and stunning color in motion, and David Stout and Corey Metcalf dominated the large back wall of the main space with fascinating shape-shifting algorithms. Again, the Santa Fe video advantage seems to be that video is being used for time-based object-experiences that are richer the longer you linger, but for the most part don’t require you to sit through some ultimately unsatisfying narrative in a peep-show setting.

Currents 2010 didn’t make it onto the Santa Fe map in the most recent issue of *Art in America*, though it was hands down the best show in Santa Fe this summer, making it clearer than ever just how little the established, big money, art world really matters.

—JON CARVER