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ART, A BALM AFTER THE STORM

by Roberta Smith



Come Together: Surviving Sandy Works by 300 artists at Industry City include Joanna Pousette-Dart's abstractions. Credit...Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

There are many reasons for living in a great city like New York. One is all the time you can spend in the company of strangers — made possible by the city's streets, public spaces and its magnificent (if flawed) public transportation system — which is both humbling and creatively stimulating.

There's also the high frequency of, to borrow the urban activist Jane Jacobs's words, "people with ideas of their own," who help keep a city alive and moving forward on countless fronts in art and in life. Some even become indispensable friends. Thus evolves another vital component of life in New York: the family you weren't born with, that elaborate network of support based on shared passions, sympatico personalities and regularly crossing paths.

"Come Together: Surviving Sandy," a sprawling, encompassing, inspiring exhibition of works by some 300 artists in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, is about this interconnectedness.

Installed in four light-filled floors of a former warehouse in the commercial and creative complex known as Industry City, near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, "Come Together" is an affirmation of New York's cultural vitality through a wide sampling of artists, who all know at least some of the others. Much bigger and definitely more random than any exhibition devoted to New York artists in recent years, it spans several generations, aesthetic inclinations and degrees of fame.

Only a few qualify as famous, including Chuck Close, Richard Serra, Shirin Neshat, Lynda Benglis and Douglas Gordon. Others have solid but relatively modest reputations, like Rackstraw Downes, Rita Ackermann, Deborah Kass, Thomas Nozkowski, Francis Cape and Stanley Whitney. Still others are young and just starting out, or older and haven't shown much recently. A great majority do not have gallery representation.

"Surviving Sandy" started as a feel-good celebration of artists who lost works, archives and studios to Hurricane Sandy last year. That was the idea of Jack Flam, the art historian who is the chief executive of the Dedalus Foundation. He enlisted Phong Bui, the publisher of the art newspaper *The Brooklyn Rail*, to oversee it.

Mr. Bui decided not to limit it to those directly affected by Sandy, which figures only occasionally in the show. He contacted artists he knew, who contacted artists they knew. To ease the demands of organizing the show, Mr. Bui moved *The Rail's* offices into a corner of the exhibition.

The show makes you see the narrowness of both fashion and history. It confirms that most art ideas and styles are in use at all times, some mindlessly followed, some pushed ahead.

With rows and clusters of boothlike spaces prevailing — many generously devoted to several works by one artist — the totality resembles an art fair, but a benign, dealer-free one. There is definitely an art fair's worth of walking.

The generational range is evident in the smaller display spaces on the first and second floors. Three large, austere beachscapes by the 86-year-old painter Alex Katz are joined by a delicate assemblage by Jo Nigoghossian (born in 1979) and the Minimalist-inspired sculptures of Daniel Turner (born in 1983), which resemble chemistry class sinks in which accidents have occurred. Intervening generations are represented by Loren Munk's painterly mappings of eras of the New York art world and Joanna Pousette-Dart's geometric abstractions, among the best of her career.

The march of booths gives way to salon-style installations titled "The Beauty of Friends Coming Together," a two-part show within a show, where the sense of connectedness intensifies. Here you'll find the least-known artists, notably the painters Becky Brown, Rick Briggs, Nora Griffin, Caroline M. Sun, Jordan Kasey and Corina Larkin and the sculptors Donna Cleary and Elisa Soliven. Another visual bonus: Mr. Bui's personal and engaging art collection, crowded onto two walls, mixes art by friends, thrift-store finds and whatnot.

The show takes up much more space on the third and sixth floors. Keep an eye out for Mr. Cape's installation, a room where his carefully constructed wainscoting finds echoes in his color photographs showing waterlines on houses in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Also here is an expansive wall installation by Diana Cooper, who lost her Red Hook studio and work to Hurricane Sandy. In "Constellation Vanity (2)," Ms. Cooper uses clusters of red dowels to evoke a distant city, with angled pipes hinting at the ebb and flow of water.

At times, the connections are emphasized. You'll find the fiber sculptures (and new ceramic efforts) of Sheila Pepe with the layered, biomorphic abstractions of her partner, Carrie Moyer. Mr. Nozkowski's small, elliptical abstract paintings are paired with the less familiar work of Joyce Robins — his wife — including glazed-ceramic wall reliefs and a 1993 scatter piece made of radiantly colored ceramic shards.

This exhibition offers a chance to catch up with artists whose works have been intermittently visible, among them Martha Diamond, Suzanne Joelson, Gary Stephan and Margaret Lewczuk, all working in abstract or quasi-abstract styles in (or related to) painting, all looking especially strong.

Other demonstrations of strength include the expressionistic paintings of Ms. Ackermann, the pattern-oriented ones of Tamara Gonzales and Katherine Bradford's slightly goofy paintings of ocean liners. Michael Joo's six works showcase his impressive sculpture and site-specific work. Another high point is formed by Arthur Simms's assemblage sculptures of wire and found objects and materials. A 1995 piece, "To Explain, Expand and Exhort, to See, Foresee and Prophecy, to the Few Who Could or Would Listen" should be in a museum collection by now.

Near Mr. Simms's works are constructions of an entirely different nature, also made of found wood, wire and occasional objects. They are among the first artistic — and very promising — efforts of Cy Morgan, a former distribution manager at The Brooklyn Rail. The juxtaposition of Mr. Simms's and Mr. Morgan's efforts is one of many moments when this egalitarian show makes palpable the greatness of New York's real art world.