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**The Generational: Younger Than Jesus** Foreground, "This Is Lacy," a live performance piece by Chu Yun, and on the wall, photographs by Cao Fei, part of an exhibition at the New Museum of works by artists 33 and under.

## Young Artists, Caught in the Act

The sweet bird of youth, alert as a robin, hungry as a gull, alights once again in Manhattan with the inauguration of "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus" at the New Museum, the latest local survey of contemporary art — this one a triennial — to challenge the pre-eminence of the Whitney Biennial.

**HOLLAND  
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ART  
REVIEW

The show is large, buzzy, international in scope and age-specific. As the title implies, only artists 33 or younger were considered for inclusion, a restriction that could be ruled age-ist in a

court of law, but it's business as usual for a museum ever conscious of its clientele.

Big-statement surveys generate big expectations: they will tell us what and who is hot, important, exciting. What we get in this case is a serious, carefully considered show, but one that, apart from a few magnetic stand-alone entries — a killer video by Cyprien Gaillard, an animation by Wojciech Bakowski, a madcap Ryan Trecartin installation — feels awfully sedate and buttoned-down for a youthfest. Kids R Us it ain't, but that's O.K.

Youthfulness doesn't carry quite the cachet in

the art world that it did a decade or so ago. The routine of dealers hustling talent straight from the classroom has made exhibitions of 20-somethings the wearying norm. Nor does "international" have much glamour any more. Art fairs have seen to that.

So it's no surprise to find that, even with the introduction of some new names, "Younger Than Jesus" feels familiar, like a more-substantial-than-average version of a weekend gallery hop in Chelsea and the Lower East Side, right down to the token Asian and African imports.

The show was put together very fast; in a year. The initial selection was done Facebook-style, with the curatorial groundwork outsourced to 150 art world experts — artists, critics and teachers — who submitted names of artists for consideration. Three New Museum curators — Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni and Laura Hoptman — made the final cut of the 50 artists, with the critic Brian Sholis assigned to create a resource center to supplement the show. (It's on the museum's fifth floor

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and well worth a visit.)

Most international surveys are assembled this way. The positive difference in this case is that all the sources are credited by name, and the runner-up artists — nearly 500 — are included in a book called “Younger Than Jesus: Artist Directory,” a kind of exhibition in print, and a terrific idea.

The exhibition catalog is also a compendium, mostly of musings from the popular press on Generation Y, or the Millennials, with each curator contributing necessarily impressionistic profiles of a generation still very much in formation.

Characteristics assigned to these artists include having a second-nature relationship to digital media; a preference for sentiment over irony; an aesthetic interest in reorganizing existing materials rather than trying to invent from scratch; and so on.

A brief glance at the show makes one thing clear: most of its participants are committed multitaskers. The artists Tala Madani, born in Iran, and Jakub Julian Ziolkowski, from Poland, do oil-on-canvas pictures of a conventional sort; Emre Hürer, from Turkey, combines painting with animation; the German-born artist Kerstin Brätsch uses hers as



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Liz Glynn's installation “The 24 Hour Roman Reconstruction Project” before it was destroyed. A video of the project is part of the New Museum triennial.



## Multitaskers, storytellers and blogosphere babies span various mediums.

performance aids; and the New York artist Josh Smith treats his like prints, churning out dozens of pictures at a time and stacking them for distribution.

Ryan Trecartin uses paint cosmetically, as an extreme form of makeup. Applying it directly to the body, he transforms himself and the other performers in his videos into frenetically walking, talking surrealist abstractions. Born in Texas in 1981, Mr. Trecartin is probably the best-known artist in the show, though with his extroverted, look-at-me spirit, among the least representative.

He's certainly one of the most versatile. A blogosphere baby, a child of the chat room, a YouTube native, he shifts effortlessly among realities while pushing sculpture, film, performance, music and language — so much language — through digital scramblers and mixers. There is some danger of his motormouth wizardry sliding into shtick, but right now it's mesmerizing.

Some of the more interesting pieces in the show share its hyped-up mode. A rapid-fire video by the Armenian artist Tigran Khachatryan alternates scenes from Sergei Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin" and clips of skateboard catastrophes to rethink the concept of revolution. A short, impressive film by the Israeli artist Keren Cytter has characters spitting out malign non sequiturs in the quick, jerky sequences.

*"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus" remains through June 14 at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-1222 or [newmuseum.org](http://newmuseum.org)*



Part of an installation by Ryan Trecartin at the New Museum.

In a live audiotaped performance, the British artist Tris Vonna-Michell begins telling a story at a leisurely pace, then gradually accelerates the delivery until the words turn into a coloratura stream of leaps and repeats, all the while holding the narrative thread. The burst of applause that greets him at the end is fully earned.

The show has a generous amount of performance, some of it, as in that case, recorded. Two male models in space-age bikinis wordlessly rearrange chunks of black abstract sculpture in a film by the Polish artist Anna Molska. In a video by the British artist James Richards, a speech instructor delivers a soundless lesson in lip reading.

Live performance has a particular chic at present, and the show has some of that too. The most spectacular example, Liz Glynn's "24 Hour Roman Reconstruction Project, or, Building Rome in a Day," came and went before the opening. With a team of collaborators and a ton of cardboard, this American artist erected a model of the Eternal City in the museum's lobby, then destroyed it,

in one dusk-to-dusk marathon. A video of the whole process is on view.

Two other performances are continuing and almost invisible. The Chinese artist Chu Yun has hired women to sleep, one at a time and with the aid of medication, on a bed in the center of a gallery for the run of the show. The British conceptualist Ryan Gander has asked that whatever museum guard is on duty in the museum's fourth-floor gallery wear a white Adidas track suit marked with embroidered spots of blood, fake evidence of a story of violence that we can invent.

The Millennials appear to be a story-loving breed. There are lots of narratives, implied or spelled out. There is Mr. Vonna-Michell's, of course, and the scripted but inscrutable emergencies in Mr. Trecartin's videos. Katerina Seda, a Czech artist, filmed her depression-crippled grandmother making drawings of household items, thereby regaining an interest in life. Both the film and the drawings are on view, crucial components of a family drama.

Through collages of newspaper and

magazine clips, the artist Matt Keegan documents the tangled politics of the America he grew up in as a child in the 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan and AIDS shared the news. With the wise omniscience that marks much of his work, he seems to be asking how we keep the lessons learned from this particular history alive and usable.

Emily Roysdon, a founder of the feminist collective LTTR (Lesbians to the Rescue), asks similar questions more directly, out loud. Her silkscreens-on-wheels are movable props for impromptu speeches, by her or by anyone moved to give one. Like certain other young American artists — Ms. Cornell writes about them in her astute essay — Ms. Roysdon makes art and activism one thing: you make history by living it, saying it, giving it form.

Those forms are pretty awesome in the extraordinary video by Mr. Gaillard, a French artist born in 1980. His three-part visual essay in aestheticized violence opens with a slowly building fight-club clash between two crowds of young men; continues with a fireworks display over a French housing block minutes before it is demolished; and concludes with a jittery flight above Soviet-era apartment towers that stand, crushingly huge and blank, in a bleak Russian landscape.

More often in this show, though, history is internalized, a state of mind, half-hallucinated, as it is in the animated film by Mr. Bakowski, an artist from Poland, who accompanied his flickering watercolor images of toilets, tired feet, detached sexual organs, rotted fruit and faded flowers with a half-whispered litany of spoken phrases. The results are reminiscent of William Kentridge's films on South Africa, but also suggested a string of diary jottings that end with a prayer: "Dead Angel God Mother, Care for us Dear Queen. If only there was no evil, illnesses and cripples."

The apocalyptic tone of this piece, and of Mr. Gaillard's, was sounded in an earlier exhibition, "After Nature," which Mr. Gioni organized last summer and is still the best thing the museum has done since its move to the Bowery. It drew its

## ONLINE: BUILDING ROME IN A DAY

A slide show tracking the rise and fall of a cardboard Rome:

[nytimes.com/design](http://nytimes.com/design)

power primarily from its imaginative generational mix of artists, with undervalued figures like William Christenberry and Nancy Graves at one end of the spectrum, 30-something figures like Klara Liden and Tino Sehgal on the other.

The two younger artists, both Millennials, are hot market properties, probably too hot for this conspicuously low-key group show (though both appear in the "Artist Directory"). Mr. Christenberry, born in 1936, and Ms. Graves, who died in her 50s in 1995, are underappreciated figures, with long-developing, multifaceted careers. It was the combination of new and old that made "After Nature" work, gave it a psychological unity and resistant texture, lifted it above business as usual.

"Younger Than Jesus" doesn't have a comparable sense of unity, texture or lift. It is, despite its promise of freshness, business as usual. Its strengths are individual and episodic, with too much work, particularly photography, making too little impact. But my point is that beyond quibbles about choices of individual works, it raises the question of whether any mainstream museum show designed to be a running update exclusively on the work of young artists can rise above being a preapproved market survey. Removed from a larger generational context, can such a survey ever become a story, part of a larger history? (The same question applies to museum exhibitions that leave young artists out of the picture.) I'm asking. It's a complicated subject. I don't know the answer.

In any case, a generational challenge has already been taken up elsewhere. A small commercial gallery called BLT, on the Bowery across from the New Museum, has announced that its May exhibition will consist exclusively of artists born before 1927. Louise Bourgeois, Lucian Freud and Ellsworth Kelly will be among the participants. The show will be called "Wiser Than God."