

Sincerity and Irony Hug It Out

At P.S. 1's "Greater New York," a new union of opposing attitudes.

By [Jerry Saltz](#) Published May 27, 2010



Mariah Robertson's *88*, on view at P.S. 1.
(Photo: Matthew Septimus/Courtesy of MoMA P.S. 1)

I'm noticing a new approach to artmaking in recent museum and gallery shows. It flickered into focus at the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus" last year and ran through the Whitney Biennial, and I'm seeing it blossom and bear fruit at "Greater New York," MoMA P.S. 1's twice-a-decade extravaganza of emerging local talent. It's an attitude that says, *I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious.* At once knowingly self-conscious about art, unafraid, and unashamed, these young artists not only see the distinction between earnestness and detachment as artificial; they grasp that they can be ironic and sincere at the same time, and they are making art from this compound-complex state of mind—what Emerson called "alienated majesty."

The best of the work at "Greater New York" pulses with this attitude. The worst of it is full of things that move, light up, or make noise, all frantic enough to make you feel like you're at a carnival rather than a museum. I yearned to see more art here that demands that you stop and be still, like painting, of which there is very little. Instead, the curators—Connie Butler, Neville Wakefield, and Klaus Biesenbach, the museum world's unofficial czar these days—favor things that are "about" painting, like Dave Miko's canvas propped on a little shelf with drips painted on the wall behind it, carrying the heavy-handed title *Lonely Merch Guy*. (When will everyone get over the ossified idea that painting's particular alchemy is suspect? Bad dogma!)

But let's look on the sunny side. I counted thirteen artists whose work I really like and twelve others whose work I'd like to see again. Like Liz Magic Laser's *Mine*, a secret-life-of-women video in which she and a surgeon perform an operation, with medical robots, on her purse (tiny tools snipping the face out of a \$20 bill, for example); the artist simultaneously dismantles and creates, remaking her purse into a Rauschenberg combine. This weirdly familiar otherness goes green in Brian O'Connell's funny-strange architectural columns composed of potting soil, which make you feel like you're occupying a very large sand castle. Or David Brooks's section of real forest mummified in concrete, a sad comment on turning the