

Rahel Alma

"ARTCLUB2000: SELECTED WORKS 1992-1999"

		<h1>NEW YORK</h1>	
	<p>People</p> <p>"ART CLUB2000: SELECTED WORKS 1992-1999" ARTISTS SPACE 21 OCT 2020 - 9 JAN 2021</p> <p>Before there was normcore, there was Art Club 2000 (AC2K). In 1992, dealer Colin de Land convened a collective of seven Cooper Union art students, Malcolm McLaren style. He was interested in youth and identity formation; they were interested in collective practices and art world celebrity culture. De Land offered them a show the following summer at his space American Fine Arts (AFA) – which became an annual affair – and played both mentor and manager. Their inaugural 1993 show "Commingle" was based on megaretailer and harbinger of gentrification The Gap, which had recently set up shop in the East Village. True to their promise to dissolve by the year 2000, like a millenarian pumpkin coach, AC2K became defunct in 1999.</p> <p>A number of works from this inaugural exhibition are on view in the tight retrospective at Artists Space in New York. More accurately, the 1993 show is restaged almost verbatim, which adds to the show's time-capsule effect. A large orange wall bisects the space; one corner has stair-like crenelations cut out, with shoeboxes stacked beside, as if holding it up. A number of walls are emblazoned with lines from dumpster-scavenged customer service, or loss-prevention manuals that also feature in seven black-and-white photographs and some ersatz merchandise display installations. Standees featuring AC2K in plush animal costumes, all puppy-eyed and droopy-eared, complete the picture. It's all <i>fine</i> in an anodyne, clean-cut kind of way. Best in show are the AC2K's iconic group portraits featuring the GAP-clad gang (clothes were cheekily returned post-shoot) donning double denim and Axl Rose bandanas in Times Square,</p>	<p>dressed in stripes in the <i>Art in America</i> library, the verticality of the shelved tomes satisfyingly echoed in a row of slat-backed chairs, playing Scrabble while reading <i>ArtNews</i>, lounging in living rooms and diners and at the Angelika Theater. (The art press, unsurprisingly, adored them.) We're at the right aesthetic-temporal distance to receive these images: the 1990s revival is over but has not yet completed its churn through fast fashion. Their vibes feel on point in a comfortable, classic kind of way.</p> <p>The rest of the exhibition features a number of other bodies of work and archival materials that highlight their interest in the gentrification of SoHo, the spectre of downtown New York, their turns abroad, gallery labour, and the art</p>	<p>– the co-option by fashion photography and marketing of various subcultures via some rather sophomoric photoshoots at their alma mater – walls are variously chromakey blue or broken into disjointed, tented slabs of drywall with a tiny drum set – a tiny rimshot to accompany the world's tiniest violin?</p> <p>If you were on the scene in the 90s, I suspect this show would feel sweetly nostalgic, a paean to being young and weird and self-destructive, to a city that did not yet have its sharp edges filed down. If you have the means to believe in the magic of downtown or the relevance of New York's art scene or whatever, maybe you'd dig it too. As a whole, the show unfolds from an unsigned curatorial essay so directly that rooms are</p>
<p>140</p>			<p>VIEWS</p>



Left: *Untitled (Cooper Union/Crow)*; Right: *Untitled (Cooper Union/Weasel)*
Both works 1994, 101.5 x 76 cm, Colour print, jumbo push pins

world's self-mythologising impulses. They flirt with institutional critique, most successfully in the sharp scrolling LED sign *Untitled (Statements Relating to the Death of the Author)* (1998) and a suite of CRTs (cathode-ray tubes) featuring prominent downtown artists reminiscing about the 70s. In an area devoted to recreating their second show at AFA

arranged according to section headings in the accompanying booklet, replete with a colour-coded map. It's a show that feels peer-reviewed in every sense of the word, whose limitations aren't of scenography or curation but the work itself, presented as-is. And it is, ultimately, a very solid retrospective of a group that arrived on the scene with such a bang, and whose

Photo: Filip Wojak, courtesy Artists Space, New York

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influence, along with contemporaries Bernadette Corporation, can be felt decades later, but whose later work boasts all the fizz of a long expired Alka-Seltzer. Who wants to be a historical footnote or worse, an academic citation? Wouldn't you rather be the caption below the ad?

There's another through-line here, however inadvertent: the terror of white representation. The past few years and especially this summer, meanwhile, have seen a much-needed corrective to the marginalisation of BIPOC artists in the US art scene. Now it may be happenstance that six white and one Asian friend formed a collective in art school and decided to make group portraits, though we can see in it a reflection of both art school demographics and the pervasive invisibility of whiteness as universal, unremarkable, a blank canvas and so on. When displayed in an exhibition context, however, we read intention into aesthetic choices. As a result, their imagery feels threatening, especially to a non-white viewer at a time when racial tensions are especially high.

I suspect AC2K might enjoy the irony of this, given the emphasis they placed on cultural context and scaffolding, along with their engagement with the poststructuralist theory of the death of the

author (or artist). But a lot has changed in a few short decades. For every generation, there's a Gap, and some gaps might just be too wide to breach.

Rahel Aima

Photo: Filip Wolak, courtesy Artists Space, New York



View of "ART CLUB2000: Selected Works 1992-1999"

Photo: Filip Wolak, courtesy Artists Space, New York



Untitled (What Ever Happened to the Drawing Center Planters/Proposal for Two Semi-Permanent Planters), 1996, Painted wood, vinyl lettering, silk flowers, mulch, Installation view Artists Space