

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL: NEW YORK'S 2022 FALL SHOWS

by Dean Kissick

In this month's installment of "The Downward Spiral," Dean Kissick writes a roundup of New York's fall exhibitions. They are many, so many, and pleasant, so pleasant, as palliatives for a doomed dying world.

"Its strange that its been 3 years since i was last here. Back then I think we all had a sense of impending doom. maybe in a fucked up way it was a cathartic release when something bad finally happened. im glad that my attempt to cynically expose and ridicule the social/economic fabric of the art industry was a total failure. i guess now i can appreciate how fleeting all of this is ..."

"Sex is [Censored] Part 3: Le Pissoir du La Perle," presented by Zac Segbedzi, Jenny's

Everybody appears to be having a hard time on paper. The exhibition texts I've read – some of which are good and most of which are not – from the shows I've been to see often paint a picture of a world that's collapsing and artists that are suffering. The artworks themselves are mostly light and pleasant, very tasteful above Houston, and seem, on their surfaces, generally devoid of politics or social commentary, but in the accompanying texts everyone is suffering. A disconnect has opened up between the way we have learnt to talk about art and what is being made, with International Art English transmuted into cursory notes of despair. Like Mathieu Malouf said a couple years ago, of the New York art scene, "Everyone wants to be treated like someone that's extremely depressed." There does seem to be a lack of joie de vivre going around. A feeling of perverse accountability hangs over everything, or at least that's how art is spoken about today: as a sort of palliative for suffering, for a doomed dying world. It can feel, reading exhibition texts, that what's really being sold is trauma, vulnerability, and structural oppression. As Mad Men once told us, "This product is special and will improve your life, let's teach the world to sing," the dealers now promise, "This very expensive painting will refract our suffering, the pain of the world, and channel it into something beautiful, yes, beautiful." It's a strange sort of luxury good.

There are so many galleries in this city it's completely out of control, so many galleries opening up, so many opening more spaces, so many viewing rooms I don't ever even get to see, hidden behind those closed doors, and all of these galleries are having so many shows, a new show every month, and working with so many artists; there are so many artists making so many paintings, so many of which are selling it defies belief. I can't believe there are so many wealthy collectors buying so many paintings from the hundreds of galleries and thousands of shows in the city each year but there are. It says a lot about booming inequality and how much money the wealthy have now, with nothing much to spend it on, and also how images have swallowed the world, how the trade in images has expanded far beyond the wildest dreams of a 1960s ad man.



DOWNTOWN

"Sex is [Censored] Part 3: Le Pissoir du La Perle," presented by Zac Segbedzi, Jenny's Through October 30

The concept here is a recreation of the stainless steel bathroom at La Perle in the Marais, Paris, a famous fashion bar and the site of John Galliano's downfall. Jenny's pissoir is lined with found graffiti-strewn steel walls on which are hung fashionable works like Pierre et Gilles' ornate portrait of Balmain's dreamboat creative director Olivier Rousteing, Amelie von Wulffen's painting of a rainbow-faced woman, and Jeremy Glogan's London skyline with a face, The Gherkin (2010). Cosima von Bonin's plush little Saint Bernard dog sculpture sits on the bathroom floor. The show was put together by Zac Segbedzi, whose own wallwork *Maenad Before a Statue of Dionysus* (2021–22) has a caption about what drives us to create and has done so since before antiquity: "a fifth reason for making art lurking in the shadows, which was the desperate, barely acknowledged need to forestall death, but this went equally for all people and was the reason humans did anything at all, and therefore this motivation was everything and nothing, and not worth thinking about, or too painful to think about."

We are all going to die and should make the most of our time, and needn't be too glum and too earnest about everything. At the heart of the exhibition is Mathieu Malouf's "Air"/"stream" (for Virgil) (2022), a sculpture of a bathroom stall and a tribute to Virgil Abloh of sorts: the urinal part is marked "STREAM" in Virgil's postmodern style, and the work feels like a combination of his aesthetic and his great inspiration, Duchamp. There's a lot of doom going around and those like Mathieu and Zac and Jenny who bring a certain levity, of any sort, to proceedings help lift the miserable gloam in a good way I feel. La Perle is a wonderful bar and this is an enjoyable show; the pissoir, like "Spacetime," can take you out of New York and into a whole other realm. There's also a metaphysical garden nearby.