



HANNAH GREELY, *MIDDLE*, 2004. COCONUT FIBER, SILICON GLUE, 9.25 x 43 x 28 INCHES.
ASTRUP FEARLEY COLLECTION, OSLO.

THE VELOCITY OF ART

German physicist Werner Heisenberg theorized that it was impossible to know both the position and the velocity of subatomic particles like electrons. One upshot of his "uncertainty principle" is that every concept has a meaning only in terms of the experiments used to measure it—something that might fairly be said of curating contemporary art.

"Uncertain States of America: American Art in the 3rd Millennium," opening on June 24, the Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS) museum at Bard College, presents the conundrum of a "survey of recent developments in American contemporary art" curated by a trio of Europeans—Daniel Birnbaum, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Gunnar Kvaran. First organized at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Art in Oslo, CCS is (somewhat ironically) the first American stop for the show.

While there's something to be said for getting outside the fishbowl for a better look at the fish, it remains to be seen whether "Uncertain States" fares any better than this year's nearly universally panned Whitney Biennial, another show curated by Europeans. How to summarize a country so big, so sprawling, with an art scene so diverse, so bereft of conveniently centralized concepts or movements, in the traditional sense?

The curators allude to this difficulty in their press release, noting that "the exhibition is not entirely American—influences come from everywhere...it seems important to remind ourselves of this complexity. The 'Uncertain States of America' are not only uncertain, they are many."

Ironically (or perhaps most fittingly), the Norwegian Astrup Fearnley company, sponsor of the show's organizing museum, earns its wealth through international shipping and transportation systems, keeping things moving around the globe. Many of the works in the show are now in the collection of the A-F museum—the show seems to have been a vehicle for some speculative collecting of contemporary American art by its director, curator Gunnar Kvaran.

This global outlook, this interest in reflecting a constantly shifting, "uncertain" terrain seems to manifest most directly in the show in a repeated fascination with the post-modern phenomena of fame and celebrity. Edgar Arceneaux is represented by a suite of works from his *Michael Jackson Project*, while Mike Bouchet's *Top Cruise* offers 1,000 disembodied, painted clay heads scattered across the floor, each (vaguely) resembling Tom Cruise.

The meme continues through a generous number of video installations by artists including Miranda July and Aida Rulova, adopting the very means and medium through which so much of our pop culture is transmitted. Something about the excited electrons streaming across plasma screens seems oddly appropriate in this context—medium and meaning collapse into each other, creating a Heisenbergian dream of a perpetually shifting, forever provisional reality.

The focused, highly selective view of current American art privileged by "Uncertain States" will perhaps tell us more about the position and perspective of its curators than anything truly conclusive about the state of art-making today—but it ought to provide an excellent marker of the taste and ideas that predominate the global art scene now, as we enter the third millennium.

"Uncertain States of America: American Art in the 3rd Millennium," is on view June 24 through September 10 at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson. The opening reception will be held on Saturday, June 24, 1-4pm. (845) 758-7598; www.bard.edu/ccs.

—Beth E. Wilson