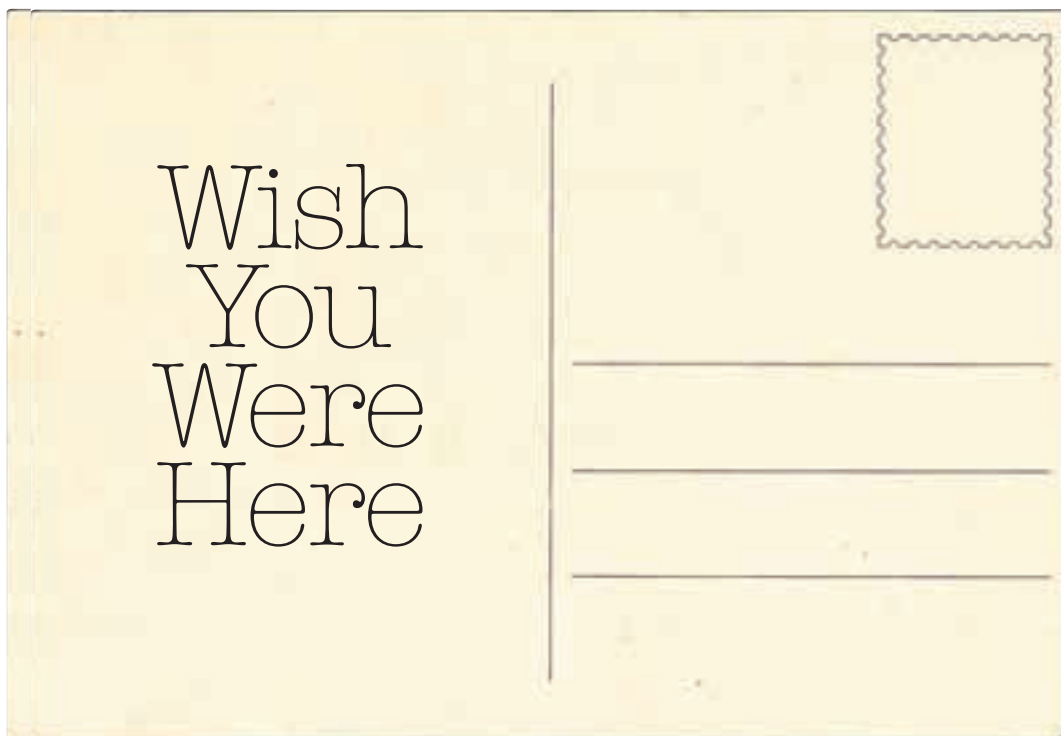




A view of Tokyo, left, in Michael Najjar's 2000 photograph *Subversion of Central Order*



Forget London and Paris, and even New York—patches of new art are sprouting up all over the world. There's the edginess and eclecticism of a resurgent Tokyo...post-Soviet reinvention in Prague and Budapest...Cape Town's postapart-heid identity quest...Mexico City's witty, socially aware conceptualism...and a vibrant design and modern art scene in Brussels. It's enough to entice seasoned as well as visitors to the art scenes.

Tokyo: Return of the Rising Sun By Kay Itoi



TOKYO IS FINALLY MAKING A COMEBACK—sort of. Japan has spent the past 15 years cleaning up the mess that followed its economic explosion in the late 1980s. After the real estate, stock and art markets went belly-up in 1991, Japan's bank debt rose, at one point, to a staggering 150 trillion yen (\$1.2 trillion), a portion of which consisted of failed art investments.

Today, after rigorous restructuring, the banks are almost debt-free, pushing stocks to their highest levels since the bubble era. The art market is also responding, with new galleries, businesses and collectors surfacing, although this is nothing like the boom that took place between 1987 and '90, when Japanese buyers spent Y3 trillion (\$24 billion) on art.

What's different this time is that art collecting is no longer limited to the moneyed set. "Just a few years ago, buying art was a special thing to do," says **Yuka Sasahara**, who opened her namesake gallery this past January.



Tokyo's new eclecticism: At the Yuka Sasahara Gallery, (1) Iichiro Tanaka's 2006 installation *Classical music karaoke*; and (2) Yosuke Amemiya's banana sculpture *Sekai: World*, 2005, an oil on FRP; and at Zenshi, (3) Takaaki Mitsui's *Tank*, 2005, made of platinum and cashew coating on cypress; and (4) the gallery's opening exhibition, including works by Tomomitsu Tada and Tomoko Sengoku

LEFT: BITFORMS GALLERY, NEW YORK. (1) KEIZO KIOKU, AND (2) YASUNORI TANIOKA, COURTESY YUKA SASAHARA GALLERY, TOKYO. (3) ZENSHI, TOKYO. (4) © HIDEKI NAGATSUKA, COURTESY ZENSHI

“Now anybody can find something he or she likes and be able to afford it.”

Sasahara is the latest of a new crop of young galleries working with emerging artists and “helping the bottom part of the market to expand,” observes **Yoshiko Isshiki**, an agent who represents artists **Yasumasa Morimura** and **Nobuyoshi Araki**. Other dealers include **Zenshi Mikami**, who started the **Zenshi** gallery last year, and **Kazuyuki Takezaki**, whose **Takefloor** gallery opened in 2004. Sasahara, Mikami and Takezaki, all in their early 30s, trained at more established galleries: Sasahara had been with **Taka Ishii and Roentgenwerke**, where Mikami was a colleague, and Takezaki worked for **Ota Fine Arts**.

In the '90s, though, their former



bosses were known as “kid” dealers. At the time, the conservative Tokyo market was dominated by gallerists who catered mostly to ultrarich collectors with overpriced Impressionist and Japanese paintings. The “kid” galleries, on the other hand, promoted the artists of their generation. **Tomio Koyama**, for one, jump-started the careers of **Takashi Murakami** and **Yoshitomo Nara**.

No longer so young, those dealers are now driving the market. And they are constantly on the move because Tokyo, with its economy suddenly recovering, keeps upgrading its real estate. Last October several top galleries, including Tomio Koyama, **Shugoarts** and Ishii, were forced to vacate a building they had settled into only three years earlier. (The building was to be demolished due to the area’s redevelopment.) Their new address is

Tokyo’s top “kid” dealers introduced artists of their own generation to what had been a conservative market. (5) **Shintaro Miyake**’s 2005 show, and (6) **Satoshi Ohno**’s *Acid Garden*, 2006, at Tomio Koyama; (7) **Shigeo Toya**’s 2006, *Double Reflected Mass*, and (8) *Minimal-baroque*, at Shugoarts; and (9) **Taiji Matsue**’s *JP-22 08*, and (10) *JP-22 03*, both 2005, at Taro Nasu



in Kiyosumi, an old warehouse district. The **Taro Nasu** gallery, which has occupied the Complex building in the Roppongi district with other leading art dealers since 2003, plans to open a branch in Osaka this summer, designed by architect **Jun Aoki**.

Relocating is expensive for the dealers, but it does give them an excuse to throw a huge party each time they move. “It attracts a lot of attention and energizes the whole scene,” says **Hidenori Ota** of Ota Fine Arts.

The original “kid” dealers and the ones who have come after them are welcoming new collectors. **Sueo Mizuma** of the **Mizuma Art Gallery** says 30-something executives who have studied or worked in the U.S. and Europe are turning up at his gallery.

“It’s natural for them to decorate their home with contemporary art,” he says, “because they’ve seen their colleagues and friends do it.”

What these buyers want is so diverse it is hard to pin down, but one thing is clear: After years of cute, cartoon-inspired paintings and sculptures (following the success of Murakami and Nara), the market seems to want something uncute.

A look at one of Japan’s top private contemporary art collections might give some indication of what is being sought after. In exhibitions of his holdings over the past two years, **Ryutaro Takahashi**, a prominent psychiatrist, has shown mostly works by edgy young artists such as **Motohiko Odani**, who makes



Right: *Metropolis, Tokyo*, 2004, by **Michael Najjar**



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beautiful but spooky stuffed animals and figures, and **Tabaimo**, who is known for large-scale installations using retro-colored animated films.

The auction market is thriving, too. Sotheby's and Christie's haven't held a sale in Japan for years, but sales at other auction houses reached ¥18 billion (\$161 million) last year, compared with ¥10 billion (\$85 million) in 2003. **Shinwa Art Auction**, which accounts for 40 percent of that market, became the first public Japanese auction house a year ago, when it was listed on the Osaka Securities Exchange.

However, auctions have yet to catch on with the newly wealthy younger set. Most buyers of top material are in their 50s or older, with modern and traditional Japanese paintings the most popular items. When the 20- and 30-somethings begin to spend serious sums on art, at auction or in galleries, perhaps then we can declare that Tokyo is really back.



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Works like Motohiko Odani's installation *ERECTRO (clara)*, 2004 (11), and Tabaimo's video installation *Japanese Bathhouse*, 2000 (12), are an antidote to years of cute, cartoon-inspired Japanese art. (13) The Shinwa Art Museum; and (14) a Shinwa auction in progress

Mexico City: Turning Conflict into Art By Edward M. Gomez

IN MEXICO, WHERE ECONOMIC disparities and other problems have persisted, hopes for the future remain undiminished. Projects such as the renovation of Mexico City's historic center, along with the anticipation of a new, possibly more progressive national government after July, have helped give the capital's art scene a forward-looking momentum. There is a feeling that the city is poised to become more than just a regional capital of art and culture—it is ready to become an international one.

Home to the esteemed **National Museum of Anthropology** and the **Museum of Modern Art** (which has the definitive collection of Mexican modernist paintings), Mexico City has, in recent years, enjoyed a renaissance in some of its most attractive neighborhoods. The swanky Polanco area and the Condesa district,



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filled with Art Deco and early modernist architectural gems, have become centers for galleries, design studios, media companies and music clubs. And the city's colonial-era Centro Histórico (downtown historic center) is undergoing an ambitious renovation, funded in large part by Mexico's richest citizen, businessman **Carlos Slim Helú**.

Galleries tend to be spread throughout these areas rather than clustered together. In Polanco, **Praxis Arte Internacional** is a leading outlet for emerging Mexican talent. It was founded in 1988 by the Argentine **Alfredo Ginocchio** as part of the Buenos Aires-based Praxis group, which also has branches in Miami and New York. "Some of the most exciting work is being made by Mexican artists

from the north of the country and outside the capital," says Ginocchio, citing **Hugo Lugo's** Pop-flavored, irony-loaded paintings of men in business suits confronted by such obstacles as a giant Rubik's cube or a monumental suitcase. Praxis also represents **Graciela Fuentes**, whose photographs of projected photographs have a dreamy, cinematic air.

Also in Polanco, not far from where the chic brigade sips cocktails at the rooftop bar of the glow-in-the-dark Hotel Habita, dealer **Ubaldo Kramer's** **KBK Arte Contemporáneo** represents artists and photographers from around Latin America. One of Kramer's most interesting discoveries is young artist **Israel Meza Moreno**, known as "Moris," whose mixed-media installations pay homage to the inventive, makeshift dwellings, fences and other structures created by



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Mexicans who live in the capital's poorest neighborhoods.

Kurimanzutto, a gallery founded by dealers **Mónica Manzutto** (formerly of the **Marian Goodman Gallery** in New York) and **José Kuri**, with major input from Mexican artist **Gabriel Orozco**, has an office in the Condesa district but no fixed exhibition space. Kuri and Manzutto have mounted exhibitions—one lasted only a day—in the nearby Medellín fruit-and-vegetable market, a carpet store and a movie theater. Their artists include Orozco and **Damián Ortega**, whose clever works include a dissected Volkswagen Beetle, its parts suspended by strings from the ceiling, and a delicate construction made entirely of dried tortillas.

Made in Mexico: (15) **Damián Ortega's** *Modulo de construccion con tortillas*, 1998; and (16) *Cosmic Thing*, 2002, a deconstructed Volkswagen Beetle; (17) **Abraham Cruzvillegas's** *Los Dos Amigos*, 2005, at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Oaxaca; and (18) an exhibition staged at a public market by the Kurimanzutto gallery

(11) KIKU KEIZO, COLLECTION OF RUTARO TAKAHASHI, COURTESY YAMAMOTO GENDAI, TOKYO; (12) JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; (13, 14) COURTESY SHINWA ART AUCTION CO., TOKYO; (15–18) KURIMANZUTTO, MEXICO CITY

Contemporary art has “developed in multiple directions, and the gallery setting hasn’t kept up with it,” says Kuri, noting that the changing shape and formats of today’s artworks have played a role in Kurimanzutto’s inspired choices of venues.

East of Condesa, in the Roma Norte district, **Nina Menocal** and **OMR** are well-established galleries presenting works by Latin American and international artists. A pioneering promoter of contemporary art from Cuba, Menocal developed the **Ninart-Havana project**, which offers architectural tours and visits to artists’ studios in the Cuban capital.

Housed in an earthquake-scarred, former private residence from the early 20th century, OMR represents “a group of Mexican artists in their 30s and 40s”—including **Eduardo Abaroa**, **Fernanda Brunet** and **José León**



Cerrillo—who have achieved recognition both at home and abroad, says co-director **Patricia Ortiz Monasterio**. **Daniel Lezama**, one of OMR’s current stars, is a kind of contemporary history painter whose ambiguous, allegorical images probe the meaning and nuances of Mexican identity with a mixture of irony and humor.

On Roma Norte’s tree-lined Avenue Álvaro Obregón are the hip **Garash Galería**, which shows the work of young up-and-comers; **Casa Lamm**, a cultural center in a renovated Art Nouveau mansion; and **El Estudio**, a small gallery housed in the Casa del Poeta, another cultural center. El Studio represents, among other artists, the legendary

Right: A still from the 12-hour documentary film *Zócalo*, 1999, by Francis Alÿs, in collaboration with Rafael Ortega



British-born, Mexican Surrealist **Leonora Carrington**.

Many Mexico City galleries take part regularly in major international art fairs, including Art Chicago, FIAC in Paris and ARCO in Madrid. They also come together for **Mexico Arte Contemporáneo (MACO)**, a four-year-old international fair that takes place in the capital at the end of April. OMR’s Ortiz Monasterio notes that MACO offers a fine opportunity to cultivate a newer, broader clientele and hints that it captures perfectly the current *movida* (the sense of activity and the energy in the air). “Everything seems to indicate that this city will keep growing in importance within the international art market,” she says.

There are a number of indepen-

dent figures are also active in the city’s art scene. **Santiago Toca**, for example, is a lawyer turned private dealer whose lineup includes the Oaxaca-based abstract painter **Ricardo Pinto** and **Jordi Boldó**, a Spanish-born abstractionist who has lived in Mexico for 30 years. Toca maintains a private viewing space in Roma Norte and organizes shows for corporate art patrons such as Deutsche Bank.

“In Mexico, there has been a dramatic aesthetic change in recent years toward conceptual and contemporary art,” Toca says. “As a result, some very good artists, especially painters whose work is rooted in modernism and abstraction, were not receiving the attention they deserved.” Toca’s choice of material fits a broader context





Left: A photograph from the documentary *Zócalo*, 1999, by Francis Alÿs

BUDAPEST IS THE TRUE CAPITAL OF THE 19th century. Of course, there are medieval and Baroque houses still hidden in the Buda hills, but the face of the city is what is visible on the tree-lined boulevards of Pest. The grand, eclectic constructions, Art Nouveau palaces, gigantic bronze monuments and majestic theater buildings define it. Created in the last quarter of the 19th century, the Hungarian capital is punctuated by beautiful bridges overhanging the Danube, stunning sunsets above the rocky hills on the Buda side and the strains of violins in the city's underground passageways. But the opulence disappeared long ago. Many of the wildly imaginative creations of the Belle Epoch architects are crumbling, and hordes of homeless people—the by-product of the new Central European capitalism—fill

Budapest: Hungary's New Moderns By Nika Radich



At the Kieselbach Gallery and Auction House: (27) Vilmos Aba-Novák's watercolor *New York*, 1935; and (28) the exhibition "Private Opinion A/1. Con-Sufferer Art After 1945," in 2000

the underground corridors.

"When Czechoslovakia was just getting started [in 1918], we were already finished," **Tamás Kieselbach**, founder and owner of the **Kieselbach Gallery** and Auction House in Budapest, says sadly. It's not strange to hear such an opinion expressed by a Hungarian. The nightmarish events that took place in Hungary during the 20th century didn't leave much ground for optimism.

"We had so few bright things in our past. Our modernism is one of the few," Kieselbach says, sitting, impeccably dressed, in his enormous, book-filled study. Trained in art history, the dealer has been a champion of

that encompasses both Mexico's long tradition of figurative painting and its rich history of modernist experimentation.

Other creative types include artist, record producer and music club maestro **Luis Figueroa**, a.k.a. "DJ Luxxx," whose gigs mix music and art. "I'm interested in bringing the rich, baroque, high emotion of Mexican kitsch into contemporary art and design," says Figueroa, who finds inspiration in the soundtracks of old Mexican movies and religious decorations. His neon-lit, mixed-media assemblages evoke the rollicking rhythms of Mexico City's daily life.

The Centro Histórico is filled with important cultural attractions, including the recently renovated **National Museum of Art**, which presented the blockbuster **Goya** survey from Spain this spring. Its vast collection traces the evolution of Mexican art from the 16th century through the 1950s. North of the city, on the way to the ancient pyramids of Teotihuacán, **Eugenio López's** **Collección Jumex**, on the grounds of the Jumex beverage corporation, is open to the public by appointment. López, based in Los Angeles and Mexico City, is the heir to the Jumex fortune. Considered Mexico's leading patron of contemporary art, he collects works by Mexican and international art stars—**Maurizio Cattelan**, **Joseph Kosuth** and **Donald Judd** among the latter.

In the art-as-provocation

department, through August, **Galería Hilario Galguera** may be giving the **Collección Jumex** something of a run for its considerable supply of art-promoting money with Mexico City's first-ever **Damien Hirst** show. (Its inevitable title, in this mostly Catholic country: "The Death of God.") Meanwhile, López and his foundation-collection's new director, Iranian-American **Abaseh Mirvali**, are planning to open a satellite space in Condesa that would make Jumex's art holdings and related programming accessible to a larger audience.

With developments like these, Kuri acknowledges that Mexico City is "an important center of artistic creativity—a city of so much conflict and so many shocks" that it offers artists an endless "source of ideas."



(25) a portrait of the artist and writer **Leonora Carrington** by **Patricia García-Gómez**; and (26) music producer-artist **Luis Figueroa**, a.k.a. "DJ Luxxx," in his Mexico City studio

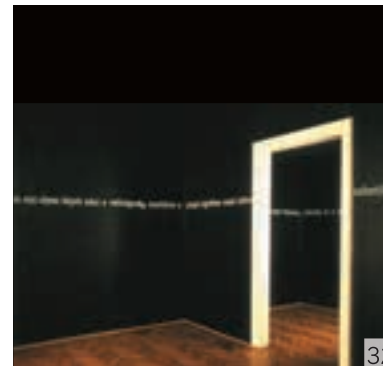
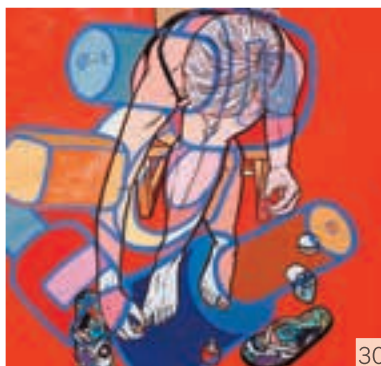
Hungarian modernism and has published numerous books on the subject. “In the West, people know only those Hungarian artists who emigrated after the fall of the Communist republic, including **László Moholy-Nagy**, or such photographers as **André Kertész**. Everything else is not known,” Kieselbach laments.

Today, however, the market for Hungarian art is gaining strength. According to Kieselbach, many sellers prefer to bring paintings to Budapest from London or New York. The rise was relatively swift. For example, a painting by the modernist **Róbert Berényi**, which could be bought at the end of 1990s for 140 florents (about \$650) might now fetch up to Ft6.5 million (about \$30,000). The auction record for a Hungarian artist belongs to 19th-century realist **Mihály Munkácsy**, whose painting *By the Stream* sold for £525,000 (\$952,140) at Sotheby’s London in June 2004.

Most collectors of Hungarian art live in Hungary, but a few Americans have begun to collect Hungarian modernism. One of them is **Nancy Brinker**, former U.S. ambassador to Hungary. Brinker says she started to collect Hungarian art a few months after September 11, 2001, when she saw a painting depicting New York by **Vilmos Aba-Novák** at Kieselbach Gallery and found it a very emotional experience. She has since acquired more than 100 paintings by Hungarian masters, and agrees with Kieselbach that Hungarian modernism has yet to be discovered in the West.

Kieselbach is not the only dealer in Budapest wishing to educate his clientele. **Hans Knoll**, a Viennese dealer and pioneer of the Hungarian market in contemporary art, resumed operations in Budapest in 1988. “Today my Budapest branch is generating more income than my Vienna gallery,” Knoll says proudly. It was a long road to success, however. In 1989 Knoll was trying to spark Hungarian interest in contemporary art when he persuaded **Joseph Kosuth** to make a special edition of prints for the local market. They were strategically priced, at around \$15 to \$20 for Hungarians and higher for Czechs, who were more stable financially at the time. Austrians were obliged to pay the international market price, and every buyer had to provide a photo ID to prove his citizen-

The ACB Galéria (29), where Soós Nóra’s *Winning Red*, 2005 (30), has been shown; (31) Csaba Nemes’s canvas *Anna*, 2005, and (32) a Joseph Kosuth installation in 1989, both shown at the Knoll gallery



ship. But this effort to encourage Hungarians to collect works by art stars proved a bit disappointing, as the majority of prints were bought by Hungarian artists. Nevertheless, he believes the Hungarian art market is on the right track today, as young people belonging to the new middle class start to collect contemporary art. “They are not only investing, not only collecting art, but buying a certain lifestyle,” Knoll observes.

Currently, a half-dozen galleries are representing the new face of the Hungarian art market. **Janos Szoboszlai**, a co-founder of **ACB Galéria**, started his career as an art historian and is the former director of the **Institute of Contemporary Art**. In the late 1990s, he became concerned about Hungary’s cultural policy. He saw that the state was unable to enlist private-sector support for culture and wanted to help change the situation.

To that end, Szoboszlai is representing young Hungarian artists, selling their work at prices ranging from Ft200,000 to Ft1.5 million (\$900–7,000). “If an artist signs a contract with our gallery, we take care of him—trying to lend his works to noncommercial exhibitions, initiating press coverage and showing his works at art fairs,” Szoboszlai says. The gallery already has foreign as well as Hungarian buyers, and is starting to show, and sell, works by artists from Japan, Portugal, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

In Budapest, the market for contemporary art is growing but is still in its infancy. Paintings dominate the galleries. “I have only one video exhibition a year,” says dealer **Erika Deák**. “Our collectors have to start somewhere, and painting is a good place. Give us 10 years, and the situation will change.”

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Luca Göbolyös’s photographs of tourists in Budapest from her series “Shadow-traveller,” 2002, exhibited at the Mücsarnok/Kunsthalle in Budapest



Cape Town: The Postapartheid World By Ernest Beck

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WITH ITS SEASIDE LOCATION, BALMY weather and dramatic setting framed by Table Mountain, Cape Town has become a tourist magnet since the apartheid regime in South Africa was swept away a decade ago. In the evenings, the bars and restaurants of the downtown Long Street neighborhood are crowded, and by day, tourist shops and outdoor markets do a brisk business selling woven baskets, beaded jewelry and carved African masks. But beyond the curios and souvenir stands, a nascent contemporary art scene is sprouting up in small pockets of the city. A handful of galleries features younger South African artists who tackle such issues as racial and gender identity, what it means to be African, and living in a multiethnic society built on the ruins of a repressive, racist one.

Photography has emerged as a popular medium to help decipher the postapartheid world. **Pieter Hugo**, 30, who is represented by the **Michael Stevenson Gallery**, an airy, modern white space in the Green Point neighborhood that opened in 2003, has recently shown large, color portraits of austere black Ghanaian lawyers in British colonial-style black robes and white wigs. Another series focuses on shirtless young black men who wash cars at taxi stands in downtown Durban. Dealer Michael Stevenson says Hugo's unflinching eye explores problematic issues surrounding the "exoticism and exploitation of whites



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Being African: (33) **Pieter Hugo's** *Vian Mthembu*, from the 2005 series "Taxi washers, Durban," and (34) **Nyameka J. Matiyana**, from the 2005 series "The Bereaved" at the Michael Stevenson Gallery; (35) **Cameron Platter's** *And Then I Saw Her, the Most Beautiful Girl I Have Ever Seen*, in pencil and crayon, at Bell-Roberts, in the Long Street area of Cape Town (36)



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taking photographs of blacks in Africa, of whites looking at blacks."

For younger artists, many of whom came of age during the transition to democracy, South Africa is a more open and accessible place than it was during the apartheid era, when the country was isolated by international sanctions and boycotts. "It was a difficult time," recalls **João Ferreira**, whose gallery is on a side street in the easily navigable Long Street area.

With the exception of art world stars like **Marlene Dumas**, who grew up in Cape Town but lives in Amsterdam, and **William Kentridge**, who lives in Johannesburg, "many of our artists did not reach the global market," says Ferreira. Today artists like **Bridget Baker**, 34, who shows with Ferreira, explore foreign locations

in their work. In a recent series of photographs, Baker created an imaginary character called the Blue Girl—a '70s-era housewife—who seems to be searching for her identity in Maputo, Lagos, Delhi, Ghent and Cape Town.

For the most part, the contemporary artists who are receiving attention are white, a reflection of the lack of educational opportunities for the country's black majority. (During the '70s and '80s, however, there was a strong tradition of "township art" by black artists depicting the harsh life in those areas under apartheid.) Yet white artists are confronting questions such as "Are we African artists, and what is African art?" says **Suzette Bell-Roberts**, who runs the Long Street area gallery **Bell-Roberts**.

Last year the gallery showed colorful faux naive drawings by 28-year-old Cape Town artist **Cameron Platter** that told of an African dictator who plans to take over the world by

(37) The João Ferreira Gallery, Cape Town; and (38) three details from Bridget Baker's triptych *The Return of the SMWW*, 2003, at Ferreira



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(33, 34) MICHAEL STEVENSON GALLERY, CAPE TOWN; (35, 36) BELL-ROBERTS CONTEMPORARY, CAPE TOWN; (37) JOÃO FERREIRA GALLERY, CAPE TOWN; (38, BOTTOM) PIETER HUGO, COURTESY JOÃO FERREIRA GALLERY



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implanting a chip into a pornographic movie. The fanciful cast of characters included Yakuza penguins and a lion, which were drawn from depictions of animals found in traditional African art.

One exhibition at the gallery **34 Long**, which opened last year, was emblematic of how local artists are trying to make sense of the country's evolving society. The show, a collaboration between **Matthew Hindley** and **Peter Eastman**, featured digital prints of beautiful landscapes and road scenes combined with sinister elements, such as skulls and blood. Gallery director **Andries Loots** says the work reflects the popular belief that South Africa would become a paradise after apartheid. "There is no place like that," explains Loots. "It is an idyllic world, but there are elements that are not so idyllic."

Although prices remain reasonable (a large print by Pieter Hugo costs around \$2,000), dealers say local collectors have been slower than foreigners to embrace the younger generation of South African artists. But that is likely to change as artists receive wider acclaim. "There's a boldness and a willingness to take risks," he says about the latest South African artists. "There has been a real shift."

(39) **Chris Ledochowski's** *Ice for Sale*, 1992, and (40) *Eagles over Table Bay*, 1996, at Michael Stevenson; (41) *Long Pass Across the Universe*, and (42) *Karoo Farm Problem*, by Matthew Hindley and Peter Eastman, at 34 Long



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Brussels: Beauty and the Bargain By Simon Hewitt

BRUSSELS MAY BE STYLED THE POLITICAL capital of Europe, but its art market takes a back seat to those of London and Paris. Sotheby's and Christie's don't sell here, and few contemporary Belgian artists have an international following. The city's flagship market, African tribal art, has been moving steadily toward Paris.

Yet Brussels is rich in art of all periods, often at lower prices than you'd find in other capitals. And it is proving an increasingly popular city to live in and to visit: High-speed trains reach Paris in 90 minutes and London in less than 2½ hours, and Holland and Germany are just up the highway.

the art market is the Sablon district, a jumble of cobbled streets leading off from Place du Grand Sablon, just 500 yards south of the Gothic, opulent Grand-Place.

Tribal art is the Sablon's chief attraction, with dozens of galleries showcasing Belgium's colonial African inheritance. This is also where the famous **Bruneaf** tribal art gallery trail takes place in June; since 2005, it has been joined by similar events for antiquities and Asian art (*see At the Fair*).

But there is more to the Sablon than those three specialties—everything from Old Masters to ceramics, and



Along with the army of Eurocrats from the 25 countries in the European Union (the city's two official languages, French and Flemish, are being supplanted by English), 100,000 French people now live in Brussels, attracted by cheap property prices and Belgium's lighter tax regime. They include France's former top auctioneer, **Jacques Tajan**, who moved to Brussels in 2003 and now runs an art consultancy and a company that helps foreigners relocate. He says he's "overjoyed to be in a great city—a capital on a human scale, with a rich and varied cultural life."

The center of Brussels is scarcely more than a mile across, and if you don't mind the odd hill, pretty much everything is walkable. The heart of

an increasingly vibrant scene in 20th-century design (**Philippe Denys**, **Yves Macaux** and **Jérôme Sohier**) and modern art (**Bernard Cats** and **Maurice Keitelman**).

A second art district lies just 300 yards to the south, across Boulevard de Waterloo, home to **Gisèle Croës** (Asian art) and **Maison Sadraee** (carpets and textiles). After a glass or six of the excellent local beer, Belgians like to call the adjacent Avenue Louise the "Champs-Élysées of Brussels." Its stylish galleries include the silver showroom of **Philippe d'Arschot** and design specialists **L'Ecuyer** and **Galerie 146**, whose **Philippe Rapin** is one of several dealers to have quit Paris because, he says, it is easier—and far cheaper—to acquire a

Photographs of urban details by **Matthias Hoch**: Clockwise from top left, *Brüssel #1*, 2001; *Brüssel #19*, 2002; *Brüssel #9*, 2001; and *Brüssel #6*, 2001



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bigger gallery in Brussels.

Neighboring streets host a number of contemporary galleries, including **aliceday**, **Baronian-Francey**, **Rodolphe Janssens** and **Polar**. At **Aeroplastics**, the show “Daniele Buetti, Is My Soul Losing Control?” runs through July 1; **Xavier Hufkens**’s **Adam Fuss** exhibition closes on July 8, and **Tache Levy** shows photographs by **Nicole Tran Ba Vang** through July 15.

A third district for contemporary galleries can be found to the north of the city center, between the Charleroi Canal and the Bourse (stock exchange)—home to **Crown**, **Meert Rihoux** and **Jan Mot**, who is showing works by **Mario Garcia Torres** through July 8.

The lineup of Brussels fairs is equally rich. The main contemporary event is **Art Brussels** in April, with 160 galleries from 20 countries at the Heysel exhibition complex. Just north of the city, the complex also hosts the **European Motor Show** in January and the 150-booth **Eurantica antiques fair** in March.

Belgium’s most prestigious antiques fair, the **Foire des Antiquaires**, has been running for

(43) A still life by **Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay**; (44) *Collections/Icons, 1997–2005*, by **Nicole Tran Ba Vang**; (45) a pair of Chinese bronze weights inlaid with silver and stones; (46) a Chinese Tang Dynasty silver cup; and (47, 48) slide projections from **Mario Garcia Torres**’s *Moonwalk Lesson (Rigo style)*, 2006



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over 50 years. In 2004 it gained fresh impetus—and doubled in size to 120 dealers—by moving to the postindustrial Thurn & Taxis exhibition hall.

Smaller fairs include the **International Antiquarian Book Fair**, in September at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, and the **Grands Antiquaires**, in November at the ArtHome, owned by Old Master dealers **Georges** and **François de Jonckheere** that also houses the Belgian auction firm **Beaux-Arts**.

Other Brussels’s auction houses, such as **Horta**, **Vanderkindere** and **Galere Moderne**, cover the whole spectrum of domestic art and antiques, with a bias toward 19th- and 20th-century Belgian paintings headed by the **School of Latem**. But nearly all the top material gets shipped off by Sotheby’s and Christie’s for sale elsewhere, says **Jan de Maere**, Brussels’s most prominent Old Masters dealer and president of the **Belgian National Dealers’ Association**.

However, de Maere notes, Brussels is a great storehouse, where galleries sell more to foreign dealers than to private collectors because prices are low by international standards. Plus, he says, in Brussels “you



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Prague: From Ashes to Art By Nika Radich

AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM, Prague was a gray city—the color of ash, with the occasional touch of mother-of-pearl. Many people are nostalgic for that Prague, with its November fog and expats crowding the cafés. What greets them today is an overrestored town. Billboards dominate the cityscape, while Japanese tourists led by tour guides traipse through the narrow, medieval streets. The romantic Prague of the early 1990s has disappeared, along with its junk shops and secondhand bookstores. Those Ali Baba–ian caves no longer exist. They’ve been replaced by art galleries and auction houses.

Entering **Jiri Svestka**’s gallery conveys an immediate sense of déjà vu. The space, occupying two levels in a



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converted factory, is more reminiscent of New York’s Chelsea than of medieval Prague. A recent exhibition there featured works by British sculptor **Tony Cragg**, installed in the spacious, window-lined halls. When asked whether it was possible to sell Cragg’s creations in Prague, Svestka answered, “I already sold one”—to a Slovak collector for €230,000 (\$282,000).

A veteran of the Czech art market, Svestka worked as a museum director in Germany before returning to Prague in 1995 to work as a private dealer. “We are not relying only on the Czech clientele,” he says. Besides Cragg, the gallery represents such contemporary figures as **Dan Graham**, **Sol LeWitt** and **Bruce Naumann**, and also sells works by **Hans Belmer**, **Oskar Kokoschka** and **Pablo Picasso**.

Svestka usually sells one piece from his international shows to local clients, who are often foreigners living in the Czech Republic, but he also represents contemporary Czech artists,

(49) Sculptures by **David Cerny** in front of Futura Gallery in Prague, 2003; and (50) an installation view of the **Tony Cragg** exhibition at the Jiri Svestka Gallery this spring

(43) GALERIE JAN DE MAERE, BRUSSELS; (44) © NICOLE TRAN BA VANG, COURTESY TACHE-LEVY GALLERY; (45, 46) © GISELE GROES, BRUSSELS; (47, 48) JAN MOT, BRUSSELS; (49) FUTURA GALLERY, PRAGUE; (50) JIRI SVESTKA GALLERY, PRAGUE



(51) **Kristof Kintera's** *Revolution*, 2005, a kinetic sculpture of a child banging its head against the wall; (52) **Michal Pechoucek's** *Pram Room*, 2004, a single-channel video



whose work is purchased mainly by foreigners for prices as high as €10,000 (\$12,000).

“There are not so many local collectors,” Svestka points out, “and they are more interested in works on paper than in installations.” Over the past few years, he says, the gallery has been turning a profit, driven in part by the popularity of **Andy Warhol**. “The parents of Andy Warhol lived in a village in northeastern Slovakia. Slovaks believe Warhol is their artist—for many of them, he is the only artist they know.” So Slovak museums are buying Warhol portfolios, and all the dentists and lawyers believe it is their patriotic duty to have a Warhol print on their walls. The prices of such prints could vary from a few thousand euros to €30,000 (\$36,000).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Czechs were champions of modernism. They traveled frequently to Paris to buy art and amassed important collections, many of which became nationalized when the Communists took over in 1948. Following the collapse of Soviet authority in 1989, some collections were restituted to their rightful owners. But the process is far from complete. Other pieces appeared on the market, including early Cubist works by Picasso. These can still be found in Prague, although at very high prices.

The market for Czech modernism, which flourished 10 years ago, when foreign buyers were rushing off to Prague to buy paintings by **František Kupka**, **Bohumil Kubista** and **Emil Filla**, has stabilized. A good Filla could sell for up to \$300,000 and a Kubista painting for over \$500,000, but such works are rare.

It seems that not all art dealers are in a rush to sell their treasures. **Zdeněk**

Sklenář, a champion of Czech modernism who resumed his gallery operations in 1995, says that on the rare occasions when serious paintings resurface on the market, they tend to sell instantly. Czech modernism is collected by locals as well as foreigners. According to Sklenář, a few American investors, have amassed impressive collections of Czech art, which they keep parked in Prague because of the Czech export laws.

Recently Sklenář exhibited Kupka's “Man and Earth,” a series he owns and is currently exhibiting in Cambodia. It had already been shown in 2005 at the **National Art Museum of China** in Beijing, where, Sklenář

believing the prices to be fairer than in galleries. Among the most serious auction houses are **Antikva Nova Kodl**, **Meissner-Neuman** and a branch of the Austrian firm **Dorotheum**. According to one observer, the problem with the local auction houses is that they are unable to prepare specialized sales, and the auctioneers prefer volume to quality. So the same sale might offer modernist paintings alongside the skin of a polar bear and bottles of so-called collectible wines.

In 2002 the Prague Contemporary Art Fair was established. Held in May in the beautiful Constructivist Manes building, the fair includes dealers from the Czech



Michael Schley's *Vinohrady*, 2000, a contemporary but nostalgic-looking view of Prague

stresses, he was the first private dealer to have had a show. He brought out a gigantic album of works by Kupka in a heavy wooden box designed by Chinese artist **Shen Shaojun**, which he is selling for €3,500 (\$4,200). More interested in promoting than in selling the collection, Sklenář plans to show it in Thailand, India, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. Meanwhile, however, he is dealing in contemporary Chinese art—an easy sell in Prague, with prices starting at \$2,000.

Art auctions are a booming business in the Czech capital. However, says **Lenka Lindaurová**, executive editor of the Czech magazine *Art & Antiques*, there are too many auctions, and buyers have to be very careful. Czechs prefer to buy at auction,

Republic as well as Germany, Austria, Slovakia and elsewhere.

Most contemporary Czech artists still aren't represented by galleries, says Lindaurová. But there have been some alternative prospects, such as **Gallery Futura**, an officially nonprofit organization established by young Italian property developer **Alberto Di Stefano**, who sells some artworks to help cover operational expenses. “The market is not strong enough yet,” Di Stefano says. So, falling back on the old barter system, he established a studio complex in an old factory building on the outskirts of Prague and convinced the owner, a real estate company, to accept art as a payment. It's a solution Prague artists have embraced. ▢