

Art in America

The Last Brucennial: The Interview

by Nick Irvin
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"The Last Brucennial," the fifth and final installment of New York artist collective Bruce High Quality Foundation's idiosyncratic biennial, opens this Thursday evening (Mar. 7-Apr. 4). Far from its first location beneath the JMT subway line in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, the Last Brucennial is being held at 837 Washington Street, an "industrial-chic" commercial complex neighboring the High Line, the Standard Hotel and the site of the future Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. Given the Foundation's mission to "to foster an alternative to everything" (most recently embodied in their "willfully non-accredited art school," Bruce High Quality Foundation University) and its signature mixture of derision and indulgence of art world dynamics, the potential of this location for statement-making is surely not lost on BHQF.

The Brucennial has always coincided with the blockbuster events of more established institutions (the Whitney Biennial, the New Museum's triennial, etc.). Its anarchic premise, however, sharply contrasts with those events: instead of a carefully curated selection of artists, the Brucennial features a maximalist, hyper-inclusive showcase of the BHQF's entire network. In the past, this has led to works by figures such as Damien Hirst and Cindy Sherman rubbing shoulders with those of Cooper Union undergrads. This time out, the single criterion for inclusion has generated much media interest: the Last Brucennial will feature only women artists.

BHQF discussed the buildup to the event with A.i.A. recently over e-mail.

NICK IRVIN Over the past few weeks you've been releasing trailers for the Brucennial, composed entirely of footage from Hollywood movies. The first two focus on disaster films, and the third branches out into footage of human masses (armies, riots, baseball teams). How would you characterize the decision to release trailers for the show?

BRUCE HIGH QUALITY FOUNDATION We like a little hyperbolic bombast to get us in the spirit of the event.

IRVIN This Brucennial is continuing your collaboration with curator Vito Schnabel, who has co-organized the two previous iterations. What keeps Schnabel and Bruce High Quality two distinct entities? How does your collaboration work?

BHQF Vito is our dealer, though it's a more collaborative relationship than the traditional artist/dealer division. We like to be involved in decision-making about where our work goes once it leaves the studio, and Vito has been importantly involved in projects like the Brucennial and BHQFU.

IRVIN It's been reported that in your e-mail calling for submissions you said that this Brucennial 1) will feature only women artists, and 2) "won't focus on this aspect of the exhibition in advertising the show." So far, the website says nothing about gender. Those are compelling moves. Can you say more about them?

BHQF Nope.

IRVIN What's the venue like this year? Do you see the various geographic sitings for the Brucennials as important for their impact?

BHQF It's about 10,000 square feet, right across the street from The Standard, courtesy of Thor Equities and Taconic Investment Partners, LLC. We selected the location for the Brucennial because it is available and highly visible. Its proximity to the new Whitney is coincidental.

IRVIN Why end the Brucennial now?

BHQF We did the first one in 2008 with 99 participants and founded our school, BHQFU, a year later. Now we have close to 700 artists in the Brucennial, and 800 regular students at BHQFU. We've always seen them as



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related projects, instigations of artistic community. But BHQFU allows for more in-depth experiences, dialogue and collaboration than a biennial exhibition can. So we're going to focus on that. Through BHQFU we're putting on a production of West Side Story this spring, and we'll host a residency program this summer. Along with the full curriculum of critique-based classes now in session,

and new ones coming up in the fall, we think this is where our energy needs to be. So this is the last Brucennial. No more! Fin!

IRVIN Any exclusive sneak peeks?

BHQF We're installing up until the last minute!