

# The New York Times

ART REVIEW | BRONX MUSEUM

## Young Artists Arrive, Either Rough or Ready



Courtesy of Higher Pictures, New York

A scene from LaToya Ruby Frazier's video "Momme Portrait Series," which features the artist and her mother.

By KEN JOHNSON  
Published: July 8, 2009

Who's ready for prime time? That is what we might have asked a couple of years ago about "Living and Dreaming," the Bronx Museum's annual presentation of works by young artists completing its preparatory program for careers as professionals. The course, *Artists in the Marketplace*, now in its 29th year, is a series of seminars in the fall and spring that offer advice from established artists, critics, curators, dealers and lawyers.

Some better questions in these trying economic times: Who's in it for the long haul? Who has the patience, determination and whatever else it takes to keep the faith in the face of minimal encouragement? Of the 36 artists represented, most look as if they could use a few more years of seasoning away from the public eye. But there are a handful who already look like artists worth watching. Three are video makers.

In a room the size of a walk-in closet, Eva Davidova has installed four monitors and a wall projection in which brief, dreamlike scenes occur: a young boy hovers, facing into a

bathroom's white tiled corner. A woman floats upside-down in slow motion near the ceiling.

In a strangely erotic and moving image, a hand probes the crevice between two surrealistically flowing concrete walls. And most bizarre, a naked torso is penetrated by the John Berger book "Ways of Seeing," drawing blood, in a horrifying and absurd image that [David Cronenberg](#) would appreciate.

Meredith Drum's "Double," a single video projection, also traffics in enigmatic, vaguely erotic fantasy. In a nine-minute narrative resembling an ultra-low-budget science fiction movie, two women are trapped for unexplained reasons on a nearly deserted beach, where anonymous men walk this way and that. The women perform a magic ceremony and take pills that will presumably help them escape their situation. In the end one happily rides off with a man on a bicycle.

In video from a series of works called "Momme Portrait Series," LaToya Ruby Frazier engages in playful physical contact with her mother. They affectionately butt foreheads, pull each other's hair and grapple like wrestlers, generating an emotional poignancy unmatched by anything else in the exhibition.

Many of the artists are represented by only one piece, which makes it difficult to estimate their potential, but a few others — sculptors in particular — also look promising.

Nathan Bennett's walk-in sculpture "Mother" is like a set for another [Stanley Kubrick](#) space odyssey. In the middle of an octagonal room constructed mostly of cut-up pieces of white foam core stands a control console with a keyboard and grids of little lights. Along with fake dark plasma screens, tiny lights glinting like stars are built into the walls. Despite the cheap materials, the whole produces an ethereal and oddly suspenseful effect.

Jessie Henson's "Lawn," a lumpy, irregularly shaped 16-foot-long sculpture on the floor made of patches of various shades of green fabric, is like a three-dimensional topographical map of a tropical island. Up close, you discover that it consists of pieces of shag carpet, creating a witty and sensuous play on the tension between nature and culture.

Nearby is a sculpture that could also have been created by Mr. Henson. It is Jonathan Brand's "Island of Despair," in which a model sailboat is upside-down in a transparent tank of water, its hull floating on the surface, while its red sails reach into the limpid depths. It might be a mystical metaphor about the inversion of ordinary consciousness.

Painting does not make a strong impression over all, but Jeffrey Hargrave's expressionistic cartoon riffs on racist caricatures have an infectiously rowdy energy. Perhaps one day he will take over where [Robert Colescott](#), the black painter and social satirist who died last month, left off.

Made in gouache with meticulous precision, Robert Amesbury's "Terrarium" offers a close-up look into a contained, paradisiacal scene of greatly enlarged purple flowers and a cactus sprouting orange blossoms growing from a bed of rounded pebbles. With a background of muted concentric circles, it suggests computer-animated psychedelia.

It is interesting to notice how little Conceptualism is in the show, which might reflect the influence of an art market that once was ravenous for salable objects. Wilfredo Ortega updates old-school Conceptualists like [Sol LeWitt](#) and Daniel Buren with a series of rectangular colored vinyl sheets neatly adhered to the wall with colored vinyl tape. It's a simple formula that you can imagine being developed into optically arresting, site-specific installations.

Besides Mr. Hargrave's mock-racist works, overtly political art is also in relatively short supply. An exception is a construction by Brendan Fernandes in which viewers watch a video of elephant tusks overlaid by a scrim of flames through the window of a camouflaged sniper's tent. Compared with the world at large evoked by such works, the art world seems considerably less grim.

*"Living and Dreaming" runs through Sept. 13 at the Bronx Museum, 1040 Grand Concourse, at 165th Street, Morrisania; (718) 681-6000, [bronxmuseum.org](http://bronxmuseum.org).*