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image

# BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

**JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT PHOTOGRAPHY WAS  
FADING AT THE HAIRLINE, ART + COMMERCE'S  
FESTIVAL OF EMERGING PHOTOGRAPHERS FINDS  
THE NEXT GENERATION OF SHOOTERS ALL WAITING  
FOR THEIR MOMENT IN THE CLARE**

Every year a new crop of photographers—young and not-so-young—emerges from the dim cocoon of obscurity to spread their wings in the blazing sunlight of art-world recognition and commercial success. For a lucky few, this metamorphosis is helped along by having their work featured in the annual Art + Commerce Festival of Emerging Photographers.

If you've opened a magazine or visited a gallery in the past year, chances are you've seen the work of at least one of these up-and-comers. Maybe it was Kevin Van Aelst's clever image of white bread cut into fractal patterns in *T*, *The New York Times Style Magazine*. Or Barry Berkley's dray color portraits of young women she met on the subway, featured in "Greater New York" at PS.1. Good work will always find an audience eventually, but for young artists the right kind of exposure at the right time can really set the ball in motion.

The Art + Commerce Festival, which is now in its second year, begins with an open call for portfolios from photographers who live in the New York area and are not represented by galleries or agents. A high-powered jury of photo-world professionals reviews the submissions and chooses the winners, who are included in an exhibition mounted at the Tobacco Warehouse, a landmarked structure in Brooklyn Bridge Park, right on the East River in DUMBO, Brooklyn.

This year's jury included ten very astute pairs of eyes belonging to publishers, photo editors (like Elizabeth Bond of *The New Yorker*), art dealers (like Melissa Bent and Marjorie Mandel of *Livingston Arms*), art buyers, ad execs, and prominent photographers (Stephen Shore, Jack Pierson, and Steven Meisel). While last year's festival featured the work of early photographers, this year's judges were asked to be even more selective, choosing only twenty-four winners out of over one thousand applicants. "This year we asked the judges to base their decisions not on great single images, but to look for artists who are in control of their medium, artists who have an idea and can communicate it effectively," says Charlotte Cotton, head of cultural programs at Art + Commerce, an agency that represents photographers, stylists, and other creative types.

Clearly this new strategy worked. The artists in this year's winner's circle are a precocious bunch who work in a wide variety of styles and idioms. Several of the most successful bodies of work are by artists who have used the camera to look homeward, exploring their own cultural or ethnic roots. For her series "Behind the Glass," Alexandra Calve returned to Minsk, where she was raised, and photographed the faces of anonymous strangers staring out at her through grimy bus windows. "It was the month



Michelle Proffitt (Chicago) (2005)



Sung Jin Park (London from the series "Mid Winter") (2005)

of January," she recalls. "There was mud with wet snow on the streets. I was at the bus stop staring with fascination at the faces glued to the windows on the public transportation. They looked at me in turn, or not. The glass separated us." Her masterful black-and-white portraits chart the seemingly unbridgeable distance between two cultures, or even between two strangers on a city street.

Sung Jin Park offers a very different view of urban life in his elegant black-and-white portraits of mid-teenagers smoking cigarettes and looking stylishly disinterested in Seoul and other cities in South Korea. Thomas Holten, a photographer who is

half-Chinese, explores his own ethnic heritage in "The Lotus of Ludlow Street," a suite of color photographs documenting the domestic life of a large family living in a crowded tenement apartment in New York's Chinatown. The details he chooses—the mattresses laid out edge to edge in the bedroom or a pile of old jackets hanging over the bathtub—nicely capture the texture and hardship of the lives hidden behind tenement facades.

Closer to the experimental end of the spectrum are prints like Samantha Bass, whose color shots of bloody wounds in teenagers' faces have a sharp focus intensity that may not jar off your head for a while, but is more meditative. "Coke, Blood"