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"Younger Than Moses: Idle Worship"

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Curated by TS+ Projects

Benrimon Contemporary, New York

Through September 6, 2010 This 22-artist exhibition at Benrimon Contemporary – which has previously hosted shows around flowers, graffiti, and life-size sculptures of Cowboys 'n Indians toys – starts with an amusing premise. The title, an obvious pun on the New Museum's 2009 "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus," celebrates "artists younger than 120 years old, the age at which Moses died." Unfortunately, the majority of work here is underripe (and occasionally just plain regrettable), with a few exceptions.

First, the high points. Travis Childers – born in 1971, and therefore quite a bit older than the median – evinces a squirrely sense of humor. "Staplerscape," 2010, uses modeling materials normally used for miniature railroads and turns the top of a common stapler into an artificial landscape. Nearby there's a floor installation of dozens of tanks, made from folded graph paper (and selling for \$20 each.) But Childers's best work is "Staple Shirt," a common button-up that hangs from the ceiling, which the artist has pierced with tight vertical rows of staples. Is it a lowbrow joke, or – since we can see the Made In Sri Lanka tag clearly – a more complicated commentary on manufacturing? William Brovelli (b. 1967)'s piece also questions the nature of how things are made and, in a sense, sold; his installation is comprised of a large "bound art object," completely obscured by black tape, along with a framed contract enumerating the terms of an artistic transaction. Both Childers and Brovelli manage a conceptual statement that's ambiguous and executed with inventive materials. They could've taught the remaining 20 artists a lesson or two.

Let's start with Ryan Shultz, whose name may be familiar to TV-watchers (or ARTINFO readers) for his unsuccessful turn on the reality show "Work of Art." As Shultz told our own Emma Allen: "I paint people in youth subculture. I usually have scenes depicting drug-use and people drinking and people lying around. You know, really capturing the generation of now..." The artist is mainly "known" for his realistic self-portraits, but here he turns in three canvases, "Facebook Pills," which depict yellow, blue, and purple pills embossed with the social networking site's familiar logo. The paintings are too smudgy to aim for photo-realism. One supposes Shultz thinks of them – if he bothers to – as a 21st century update on Damien Hirst's medicine cabinet.

Speaking of Hirst – there's Deniz Ozuygur's sculpture of two skulls kissing, with the jewels this time appearing on their teeth. Braces, get it? For the Love of God. Ozuygur's other photo and sculpture, "The Kiss," envisions two pieces of foam slithering across a bed. They look a bit like vegetarian bacon. In any case, the inspiration seems plucked from another YBA alum: Sarah Lucas and her 1994 "Au Naturel," an installation made of a dirty mattress, vegetables, and a bucket.

Elsewhere in the show there's more gleeful appropriating of contemporary art history, without much self-awareness. Kahori Kamiya's "Follow Me" splices together moments of popular films in which the titular phrase is used, and combines it with Twitter imagery. It's a near facsimile of a Christian Marclay – "Telephones," say, or "Looking for Love," in which the artist hunts for the famous four-letter word on various vinyl records. James Woodward's "Self-Portrait with Football" is, according to the press material, a work that involves "rapidly humping a football" as the artist "explores the jock icon while exploring his own sexuality." It also looks like what someone would make after seeing Abramovic's "Balkan Erotic Epic" at that artist's recent MoMA retrospective. Jinkyung Chang's three large-scale photo portraits seem like little more than an excuse to get naked and poke at racial identity; the artist appears nude, covered in chocolate, curry, or flour. Adam Krueger's lame explorations of the 'life of the artist' involve an action-figure version of himself. ("Includes frame with removable paintings!")

Keren Weiss's "Are You Happy Now?" brings a small glimmer of hope. It's an oil painting that depicts a gallery installation of a smiley-faced neon sign. There's at least a pulse here, something creeping along at more than one level. As for the remainder of "Younger than Moses," they seem destined to make runner-up reality TV art, at best.