

ARTFRUM

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STEEL YOUR MIND: The 2013 Carnegie International by Keith
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Carnegie Museum of Art

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Frances Stark, installation view of *Bobby Jesus's Alma Mater b/w Reading the Book of David and/or Paying Attention Is Free*, inkjet print on paper and multichannel projection with sound (4:20 min), 2013

According to this year's press materials, "The 2013 *Carnegie International* presents new voices rooted in history, a sense of place, and play. The exhibition is guided by a shared passion for the individual and the exceptional; for art that celebrates dissonance and beauty; and for artworks that stay in touch with the everyday." Normally, language such as this can be extremely frustrating. This is some of the most generic writing about some of the most ubiquitous, casual, and boring tropes that have recently become exhausted in almost every art city in the world. In this case, it is especially frustrating, because unlike many of the recent manifestations of such atrociously vague and vanilla conceits concerning "play" and "the everyday," the three curators tapped this time around for the *International* have taken a decidedly focused, yet sprawling approach, which luckily for them (and all visitors), has yielded incredible results.

Unlike most curators of extensive projects such as this, Daniel Baumann, Dan Byers, and Tina Kukielski, chose to become extremely involved with the city of Pittsburgh throughout their research and planning for the exhibition—so involved, in fact, they rented an apartment in the Lawrenceville neighborhood along the Allegheny River, not too far from the downtown area. Leading up to the opening of the exhibition, they held

various events of all sorts at this apartment, and also co-organized concurrent events elsewhere throughout the city.

Despite this partial assimilation, they clearly never became regionally obsessed. While making Pittsburgh their collective base of operations and heavily familiarizing themselves with the surrounding areas, in what can be understood as the most logical (yet perhaps least practical) way to truly find history and a sense of place, they simultaneously looked to other rich cultures, places, and histories from across the globe, and made explicit and implicit connections. From these connections, they have created a romping and rolling survey filled with candor and curiosity, humor and humility. This is evident from both afar (online) and in person (while actually occupying the mental and physical space they have created for the viewer).



Nicole Eisenman, installation view of *Spring Fling*, *Coping*, and *Prince of Swords*

The show is generally smart, fun, and playful, while never exuding any self-consciousness about being didactic or pretentious, silly, childish, or lacking serious rigor. The pace of the show continually oscillates between slow meditation and improvised reaction, much like the evolution a town hall meeting or a local sporting event. This is not an accident, as the events leading up to the show likely weren't all that dissimilar to those sorts of immersive activities.

Through their fastidious efforts, they really have taken the general public's interests into consideration, while also respectfully maintaining equally high hopes and standards for all visitors. They have managed not to overload or underwhelm, and have pushed boundaries without pushing viewers away. In keeping with the idea of "place," many of the pieces included hinge on the idea of storytelling, which is distinctly more appealing than the broader notion of "narrative" in art. Many of the artists presented here truly tell stories, and do so similar to the way a grandparent might tell a story to a grandchild or a regular at a bar might tell a story to anybody who will listen; that is, with years of proven practice—knowledge of how and when to accentuate certain words, how and when to brush over certain details, and how and when to ramp things up or slow things down.



Erika Verzutti, Installation for the 2013 Carnegie International, 21 mixed-media wall-mounted and floor sculptures; dimensions variable), 2013

One of the first stories to be told is by Erika Verzutti; just to the left of the admissions desk hang and sit her sensitively worked over cast concrete editions of industrial beauty. Still on the first floor, in the Hall of Sculpture is Pedro Reyes' ghostly, yet inviting sound installation, comprised of all-black, self-playing instruments. Encompassing Reyes' musical sculptures are Joel Sternfeld's keen anthropological studies of experimental

attempts at utopia throughout the United States. The audiovisual ambiance emitted from the pairing of these two groups of work is entrancing. Just above Reyes and Sternfeld, Nicole Eisenman has thoughtfully decorated her assigned upper atrium with wit and charm, surrounding Greek bodies with spirited and snarky art historical paintings and sculptures.



Pedro Reyes, *Disarm (Mechanized)*, Recycled metal (installation comprising 8 mechanized instruments), 2012-2013



Joel Sternfeld, installation view of the series *Sweet Earth: Experimental Utopias in America*, digital c-prints, 2005

Two of the more poignant and profound works are lengthier video installations upstairs. Ei Arakawa and Henning Bohl project a surreal travelogue, starring Arakawa's mother and brother and Bohl's daughter. The characters tour city streets and playground structures, mainly in Fukushima (Arakawa's hometown), two years after the 2011 toxic earthquake and tsunami, provoking the viewer to question cultural and generational pride and insecurities. Unrelated in content, Frances Stark inadvertently pushes some similar personal buttons, to a degree. Her blunt and boisterous room combines hip-hop culture and academic art tropes into a voided spectacle, while revealing the arrogance and anxieties within both camps.



Ei Arakawa and Henning Bohl, *Helena and Miwako*, Video; color, sound (37:17); and built structure, 2013

It is so rare to experience an exhibition of this magnitude that engages with the public in so many different ways on so many different levels, without it coming off as some sort of hokey philanthropic effort that is intended to lightly veil bureaucratic or donor-based interests. This sort of effort can be a risk, but it paid off this time. Despite the popularity of The Andy Warhol Museum and a premier academic art institution in Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh certainly has an unequivocal preference for football, motorboats, and ATVs over paintings, photographs, and sculptures. Still, the benevolence of this year's iteration seems to have made an impression, bringing out perhaps otherwise ambivalent art viewers in strong numbers. The *2013 Carnegie International* is exceptional proof that art can actually be challenging and entertaining, political without being divisive, and broadly inclusive.

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