

ARTnews: 'Meet the Bruces: the High Quality Comes to Brooklyn Museum' by Emily Nathan, June 26, 2013.

Meet the Bruces: High Quality Comes to Brooklyn Museum

BY Emily Nathan POSTED 06/26/13

[The collaborative tricksters Bruce High Quality Foundation offer love, chicanery, & more](#)

Democratic and even bohemian in their practice, the five anonymous members of the Brooklyn-based artist collective Bruce High Quality Foundation insist that they make “art by committee,” free of any internal hierarchy. Their 2012 Brucennial, a parody of institutional biennials, featured hundreds of works hung salon-style in a cramped space on Bleecker Street, with paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat and photographs by Cindy Sherman interspersed between sketches by their buddies from Cooper Union, where the Bruces attended art school. But the all-male group—created to preserve the legacy of the fictional “social sculptor” Bruce High Quality after he perished in the 9/11 attacks—has also worked with a number of art-world institutions, participating in the Whitney Biennial and showing at New York Modernist landmark the Lever House. And on June 28, the Bruce’s first solo museum exhibition will open at the Brooklyn Museum.

Subtitled “Ode to Joy, 2001–2013” and billed as a retrospective, the show is slated to include what the guys cheekily describe as “less than 17,000 works . . . some very recent works and some works that aren’t finished yet and may never be.” (The Bruces would only be interviewed over e-mail, and they responded as a group.) Curator Eugenie Tsai cites museum director Arnold Lehman’s interest in “the Brooklyn connection and the boys’ irreverent attitude” as the impetus for the show, and notes that it will not follow a linear narrative or be organized chronologically. The Bruces agree, adding that “it may not even be organized.”

In non-Bruce terms, “Ode to Joy” will actually feature around 50 objects, though many pieces have several components. Themes, the artists state, encompass “American exceptionalism, financial chicanery, love, misgivings, collectivism, cannibalism, crowds, mistaken identities, and education,” and one new work consists of “re-creations of every Greek or Roman object in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Made in Play-Doh.” Also on view will be excerpts from their “History Paintings” series, which restages scenes from iconic art-historical works; a video program; a slew of photographs documenting their actions throughout the city; and even the skiff they used to chase Robert Smithson’s posthumously realized floating island in waterways around Manhattan in 2005.

“BHQF are not institutional animals, yet they are very much embraced by the art world,” explains Tsai. “They are simultaneously insiders and outsiders, which is quite an unusual position to be in.” When asked whether they felt that they had to compromise at all, adjusting their work to suit the nature of an institution like the Brooklyn Museum, the Bruces replied, “Yes, we have had to compromise in order to do the exhibition. For instance, we wanted to use the entire museum.”

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