

# BLOUINARTINFO

## 10 Highlights at PS1's "Greater New York"

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Jimmy DeSana's "Contact Paper" 1980, currently on view as part of "Greater New York."  
(Courtesy Salon 94, New York)

"Greater New York," the vast MoMA PS1 exhibition now in its fourth installment, brings together some 150 artists who all work in the five boroughs (or worked, in the case of the several included who are no longer living). It's a show that makes some surprising, and arguably unsuccessful, decisions: a packed room full of figurative sculpture; pieces from artists who aren't exactly suffering from under-recognition, like Louise Lawler or Gordon Matta-Clark; a dearth of new media or so-called post-Internet work, perhaps so as not to step on the toes of the recent New Museum Triennial; and a periodic emphasis on fashion and commerce. That said, we've made some snap judgments as to the 10 artists who pushed our buttons the most in this dense, and inevitably divisive, survey.

### Jimmy DeSana

The photographer, who died in 1990, made poetically surreal portraits, shot with pinkish-purple light effects that are simultaneously nostalgic and futuristic. Bodies turn into sculptures, captured in ways that are both beautiful and absurd. In one, two pantsless men are in a shower wearing motorcycle helmets, bound to each other within the same oversized sweatshirt — they appear caught in the midst of an obscure ritual, or the world's least explicable sex act.

### Kiosk

Formerly a brick-and-mortar shop in Soho, and now an online-based archive and retail destination, Kiosk exemplifies the ways in which "Greater New York" strives to include projects and collectives beyond the stricter definitions of contemporary art. I'm including them on this list with a grain of salt, because — while it is pleasant to meander through the gridded mania of clear-plastic shelves, ogling bright pink toilet brushes, calendars proclaiming that "Cats Let Nothing Darken Their Roar," and other whimsies sourced from around the world — the overall effect is less "creative taxonomy of esoteric consumer goods" and more "refined Urban Outfitter's for fans of minimalist

design.” Does Kiosk have any place being in a museum survey? Personally, I’m not buying it (all puns intended).

### Sara Cwynar

A conceptual peer to Hans-Peter Feldmann, Annette Kelm, and Eli Lassry, Cwynar has three pieces in this survey. Two of them are photos-of-photos, in which we see the artist’s fingers holding mini-images of the Acropolis and details of Mondrian paintings. The other is a 12-image edit from her “Flat Death” series, a row of seemingly unrelated images – a toucan, a display rack of Chiclets – generating their own loopy associations.

### Greg Parma Smith

Landing on just the right side of kitsch, and bearing an affinity to someone like Lari Pittman, Smith combines skilled draftsmanship with a love for the goof-off. Two works from his “Poseurs” series are competent portraits of naked subjects; the thing setting them apart from a bland studio exercise is raised patterns on the surface (of horses, or hands holding brushes, or small nudes-within-the-nude). My favorite piece, though, is a ghoulishly pretty sunset scene, with birds coasting through the air; Smith has affixed three plastic masks of witchy old women to the canvas, and the image continues seamlessly across them.

### Nick Relph

This New York-based British artist contributes a series of mounted photographic works made by capturing images from construction hoardings and other surfaces using a digital scanner. The resulting images are either coolly abstract or unnervingly glitch – as when the renderings of soon-to-be-built high-rise buildings appear to be on their way to a structural collapse.

### Glenn Ligon

“Housing in New York: A Brief History” is a series of text-based works – black words silkscreened on a wall – that form a diary of all the places Ligon has lived in the New York, from the Bronx of his childhood to sublets throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn with a variety of problems – the bathroom ceiling caving in, landlords who refused to turn on the heat in winter – to finally becoming a homeowner.

### Deana Lawson

Lawson’s densely layered images celebrate black bodies and the importance of family and community, and include photographs of a congregation in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a party in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and a wall-length series of appropriated images of a cousin in prison, posing with his wife during her visits. With so much work preoccupied with life in a post-capitalist world or whatever, it was nice to see something explicitly focused on race, which seemed to be missing from much of the show.

### Alvin Baltrop

Baltrop, who died in 2004, took hundreds of photographs at the piers on the west side of Manhattan between 1976 and 1985, once an industrial hub and popular cruising spot for gay men before it was transformed to playgrounds and expensive real-estate. These images, 30 of which are included here, capture the abandoned buildings along the Hudson River, occasionally populated by men in various states of undress having sex, sunbathing, or just posing for Baltrop’s camera.

### Ben Thorp Brown

“Toymakers” was filmed in a factory in Quebec that makes limited edition toys that are given to people who work for large corporations as prizes after making large financial transactions – mergers, transactions, etc. The video, a combination of static shots around the factory floor, focuses on the labor of producing the toys and concentrates on the human hand at work, often in close-up shots.

### Chantal Akerman

Akerman, who died on October 5, is one of many amazing artists showing work in the film program at Greater New York. From November 8 through 14, the exhibition will screen “New From Home” (1976), an experimental documentary featuring a female voice reading letters from Akerman’s mother to her daughter, set to static shots of various spaces, mostly unoccupied, in New York City.