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New Age

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A New York art collective paves its own road.

In late August 2008, 10 young New York artists who called themselves the **Still House group** — all then in college or art school, none older than 23 — had their first exhibition, at **7 Eleven**, a temporary gallery in a downtown Manhattan building about to be demolished to make way for a luxury hotel. For a week they worked around the clock, eating and sleeping in the gallery, building out the space to meet their requirements, and making and installing their pieces. The photographers tacked up their prints, some of them candid shots in a style that filtered the gritty yet tautly aestheticized snapshot approach of [Nan Goldin](#) through the romantic atmospherics of [Ryan McGinley](#). The mixed-media artists helped one another assemble their works on the spot. By early September, when the crowds — mainly their downtown friends and colleagues — poured in for the opening, they had become a cohesive group. They were young, creative types in New York, and they'd banded together to make something happen. The sky, it seemed, was the limit. A week later Lehman Brothers fell, and the world was irrevocably changed.

Fast-forward a year, and Still House's second show is scheduled to open on December 12 at the Lower East Side gallery **Rental**. Months into the recession, the art world's attention has turned to collectives — such as the **Bruce High Quality Foundation**, also based in New York — that through activities like forming alternative art schools have subverted the academicism and commercialism of the boom-time art system. In this context, Still House's cooperative diy approach to making, promoting, displaying, and distributing art looks more relevant than ever.

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The impresarios who put this enterprise together are the photographer and filmmaker [Isaac Brest](#), a Los Angeles native who graduated in May from New York University, and his friend [Alex Perweiler](#), a graphic-arts major at Parsons the New School for Design who hails from New Jersey and also takes photographs. Two years ago, they realized that all their New York pals were making visual art of some kind. Why not organize and even manage them, eschewing the usual art world byways in favor of self-sufficiency? "I'm good at making things happen," says Brest. "I don't think of myself as an artist."

The group is fluid: Some members drift out, others in — including, recently, its first two women: [Dylan Kawahara](#), who does mainly fashion design, and the photographer [Gia Coppola](#), granddaughter of [Francis Ford](#). That fluidity is one of Still House's virtues, says an original member, [Zachary Susskind](#), a photographer who graduated in May from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and who knew Brest growing up in L.A. (In September the two worked on the Philadelphia set of a **James L. Brooks** movie, Brest assisting a cameraman and Susskind running dailies back to New York every evening.) "We're not blood brothers or anything," Susskind says. "This isn't exactly a 'fuck the system' kind of thing. The group isn't strictly defined, with overarching aims. We're independent young people with no resources, no space, no facilities. This is the worst time to be let loose in a century. We help each other out. Right now, young people aren't necessarily saying, 'I want to be represented by a gallery.' A lot of us are feeling frustration."

Still House's curatorial efforts are paralleled by its publication of work accessible to a younger generation. "Our first priority is shows, but we're also focused on making zines, prints, books — things that people our age can own," says Brest. Perweiler produced a book of Susskind's work, a delicate volume of photographs called *Air Travel*, printed on tissue-thin paper, that impressionistically documents a trip Susskind made to a handful of Asian cities. Lately Perweiler has been at work editing a book of photographs by **Grear Patterson**, a recent Still House inductee, to be published by the artist collaborative **Our House West of Wynwood** (O.H.W.O.W.).

The only one in the group currently pursuing an MFA is [Brendan Lynch](#), who started at New York's School of Visual Arts in September. Lynch works in various mediums, achieving cohesiveness in his oeuvre through its overall nimble inventiveness. Lately he's started to catch the art world's eye. In September he could be found making one of his abstract wall paintings in the Long Island City space of **Deitch Projects**, having been chosen by Vogue art writer [Dodie Kazanjian](#) for inclusion in "The Open," an exhibition of 31 emerging New York artists that she curated there. His work also figured over the summer in an exhibition curated by another Still House artist, [Jack Greer](#). A 23-year-old Pratt graduate and multimedia artist given to large, abstract, bloblike sculptures made of foam and wood and painted in psychedelic colors, Greer was invited by his friend the pro skater (and artist) [Alex Olson](#) to assemble a show for a downtown Quiksilver pop-up store, complete with skate ramps, and he turned first to his Still House colleagues.

[Terence Koh](#), the Beijing-born, New York-based artist formerly known as asianpunkboy, occasionally promotes Greer's zines. Still House also has links to the older generation of downtown talent from the circle of the late [Dash Snow](#), whose work the younger artists revere and whom they credit with giving them a sense of potential.

[Lucien Smith](#), a Cooper Union student who, at 20, is the youngest Still House member, was an assistant to the painter [Dan Colen](#), and Patterson became Snow's de facto assistant while working for the now-defunct Rivington Arms gallery when it represented him. The connection also is evident in the Still House group's work. [Louis Eisner](#), for instance, exhibited paintings at the Quiksilver show depicting a figure made of dripping candles and Jiminy Cricket's shadow, riffs on subjects favored by Colen.

Despite such connections, the Still House artists are careful to distance themselves from the trendy and, in some ways, media-generated downtown scene, as well as from art world politics. "Work should speak for itself," Brest asserts. "Everything should be based purely on the work." As for making that work during recessionary times, he claims, "This is the best time for people our age. The system has crashed."

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