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Saatchi's new stars: collector prepares for new gallery opening

As the world's most influential art collector prepares to open his new gallery on the King's Road, he reveals the latest crop of six contemporary artists he has alighted on. Exclusive report by Arifa Akbar

Charles Saatchi: art patron, showman, cultural impresario. To some, he has done more than any other to shake up the contemporary art world and enliven the British scene with remarkable, visionary collections. To others, he is the former ad man whose taste for the bold and the brash, for the controversial and the confrontational, has started a trend for a generation of artwork that rewards shock-value but little else.

The man who set in motion the "Saatchi decade" with a collection that comprised works by both the best known and the most obscure figures in conceptual art can be relied upon to provoke a sharp divergence of views in critical circles the world over. But by now, with the Young British Artists he plucked from anonymity in the early 1990s regarded as undeniable greats, one thing is beyond debate: Mr Saatchi sure knows a good thing when he sees it.

Damien Hirst, one of the first youthful talents to benefit from the dealer's perceptive eye, is now the world's most expensive living artist. Tracey Emin is a name instantly synonymous with creative courage combined with an unshakeable star-quality. The Chapman Brothers, Stella Vine, Mark Quinn: the list goes on and on. But, as Emin herself admitted with characteristic honesty at this year's Venice biennale, the Young British Artists are no longer exactly young. "We're Middle-Aged British Artists now," was her deadpan verdict. "MABAS."

And so what now for the man with the Midas touch who has made his own career out of making the careers of others? Simple: to find the stars of tomorrow.

Mr Saatchi is notoriously media-shy and known to be so reclusive that he eschews the opening nights of his own exhibitions and rarely gives interviews. But today The Independent can exclusively reveal the identities of the up-and-coming artists whom he credits with the talent to transform the art scene in a similar way to the YBAs.

There are six of them, all fresh faces on the contemporary art scene, the youngest in her mid-twenties and the eldest in his fifties. One displays a preoccupation with disturbing images of male sexuality, another prioritises the elusive quality of "fun" above almost all else. What they all have in common, however, is a raw talent that has convinced the world's most famous collector. Now all he has to do is convince everyone else. To this end, he intends to showcase these works along with established collections at the new Saatchi Gallery, on the King's Road,

London, which will give free admission to the public in partnership with Phillips de Pury & Company auction house.

Saatchi intends to champion the work of these "emerging" artists, plucked from across the world, in the 70,000 square feet of exhibition space in the gallery, which is due to open in January.(2008) After having sold some of the work of the YBAs that he became so synonymous with a decade earlier, he described how this latest venue would function as a launch-pad for young, previously unprofiled artists. "The new gallery is going to have a clearly defined role to introduce very new art and artists from Britain and the rest of the world," he said.

He added that the gallery was aimed at introducing "as many people as possible to very contemporary art and make it easily accessible to art students and all schools." The new collection includes artists from all over the world, from contemporary Chinese artists as well as Londoners, such as Barry Reigate, a 36-year-old Croydon-born painter. Reigate was showing his work "Flies around the Fury Flotsam" at a group show at the Curator's Base gallery in London in 2005 when Saatchi wandered in and bought his painting, and later acquired three more. His canvases are described as "pop-porn at its best" containing hedonist visions of disembodied breasts and phalluses. Another of Saatchi's finds is Rudolph Stingel, who, according to the Saatchi Gallery, offers conceptualism with "Blue Peter" simplicity. The Italian artist, born in Merano, had no formal training when he began his career as a portrait painter straight after high school. He had been exhibiting around Europe and America when Saatchi spotted his work.

A spokeswoman revealed his buying methods, which included an arrangement with international art dealers in which he could "view" works for 24 hours before deciding on a sale.

"He gets sent images sent by about 25 or so of young dealers in New York and Los Angeles and they have now got a system in place whereby if he thinks any of the images are interesting, he get the works sent over here for 24 hours so he can see them properly. If they are not for him they can be sent back the following day," she said.

Six of the best?

BARRY REIGATE

Jokingly describing himself as "the blackest white man in art" and "the Ali G of the artworld", Reigate (right) has made it his mission to put the fun back into the profession. "I grew up with Jamaicans and West Indians in Streatham and I play on the idea of being loud and carnivalesque," he said. His work, characteristically painted in squiggly brush marks and smears, captures contemporary schmaltz with great wit and effervescence.

PHOEBE UNWIN

Born in Cambridge in 1979, Unwin is one of the youngest artists in the collection. Her work focuses mainly on portraits, taking in historical references and is described as "painterly" with a keen focus on texture and colour. She has exhibited at The Slade as well as the Anthony

Wilkinson Gallery, in Bethnal Green, east London. Saatchi bought five of her paintings from her degree show.

THOMAS HOUSEAGO

Born in Leeds in 1972, his work (below) is said to "playfully subvert the expectation of sculpture" by drawing references to Classicism, Cubism and Futurism. His monumental structures are often figurative and mythological and, in spite of their size, often appear almost comically flimsy. Much of his work tends to border on abstract art, with rough hewn and incomplete forms that highlight the process of making a work of art.

RUDOLPH STINGEL

Despite not presenting his art on traditional canvases, Stingel regards himself as painter nonetheless. He invites the audience to interact with his installations and photographs, which he sees as public "collaborations". The Italian has covered the walls of a gallery in silver insulation panels and allowed people to make them in whichever way they felt. In his 1991 New York debut exhibition, his entire collection consisted of a bright orange rug in an otherwise empty gallery.

CLAYTON BROTHERS

Collaboration is central for the American-born brothers Rob and Christian, whose relationship is described by the Saatchi Gallery as "resonating through every aspect of their paintings and installations". They are said to create artworks together on an intuitive basis but seldom work on a canvas at the same time or discuss their projects until they are complete. Playing off their "unspoken synergy", they take turns inventing, adding to and editing each piece. They draw inspiration from their immediate environment.

TALA MADANI

The Iranian artist, born in Tehran in 1981, studied at Yale University School of Art and exhibited at the school's graduate show in 2005, winning the Schickle-Collingwood Prize before going on to study a masters in Fine Art. Her work is tough, confrontational and often hard to look at. Madani refuses to shy away from political controversy, and symbolises suicide bombers with depictions of pink pastries.