

New York

A brief look at this month's list of the 100 most powerful people in the artworld reveals a lot about what's required to participate in influential circles. While not everyone on our list is absolutely loaded, most have access to cash through fortune or funding; most are white; and most are schooled in the Western tradition. These commonalities underlie a society bound by rituals of association – art fairs, exhibition dinners, auctions, committee memberships – which in turn reflect and reinforce shared assumptions of criticism and class.

Of course you know all this, and most critiques of such closed cultural circuits – mine included – are really just cases of the children of privilege gazing at their own entitlement. So let's look at something happening this month that concerns people excluded from the social mainstream by virtue of all the above criteria: *Vogue-ology*, an exhibition at Parsons the New School for Design organised by members of the sound collective Ultra-red in conjunction with members of the house/ballroom community. The latter (see the 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning* for a slanted intro) are mostly male-to-female transgender people of colour – many rejected by their own families – who create kinship associations known as 'houses' ruled by mentoring 'mothers' or 'fathers'. The community's ritual glue is walking in balls: highly scripted drag performances that mimic fantasies of privileged desire, eg, high-fashion spreads in *Vogue*. More than a cakewalk, this finds voguers subsuming a canon of beauty unreachable for all but the richest and most 'perfect' of women, and transforming it into a higher art. Voguers beat *Vogue* at its own game by becoming even more beautiful than its readers can.

As a ball participant has written: 'Beauty begets control. Artifice equals power.' What these words mean to the speaker, however, are not necessarily what they mean to our Power 100, and the challenge for Ultra-red is how to reveal that significance. Thus the exhibition is conceived as part of an ongoing process of discussion and listening; its ultimate goal is the establishment of a house/ballroom archive organised around terms defined by members of the community. Situating these analytical criteria within the house mindset not only respects and reveals the community's voice, but also – if successful – transcends the power relationships and social prejudices inherent in most mainstream analysis. These are the very assumptions of inclusion, entitlement and form which underlie the marginalisation of the house/ballroom community, among others, and which its participants, in turn, subvert and exploit in creating their own structures of aesthetics and power. Along the way, 'we' become the outsiders: a refreshing and thought-provoking turn of events.

Vogue-ology, Parsons the New School for Design, New York, 17–30 November

words **JOSHUA MACK**

water. (No word yet if you should eat before visiting this show.) If Song makes something out of almost nothing, **Cosima von Bonin** (*Witte de With, Rotterdam, to 9 January, www.wdw.nl*) turns something into nothing. In partly titling her show *Cosima von Bonin's Far Niente*, referencing the Italian phrase *dolce far niente*, or sweet idleness, she puts an ironic spin on what is a seriously labour-intensive show. Occupying the entire institution with her characteristic stuffed animals, droll takeoffs of Minimalism, fabrics and other presciently postmedium



shenanigans that underwrite wild ambiguities of tone, van Bonin's first major show in the Netherlands promises to do anything but underwhelm.

Manifesta (*various venues, Murcia and Cartagena, to 9 January, www.manifesta.org*)

has always positioned itself at interstitial points: sometimes disastrously so, as when the 2006 edition of the itinerant biennial imploded amid conflicts between the curators and the government in Nicosia, Cyprus. The last Manifesta, in 2008, on the Italian/Austrian border, was an understandably cautious affair. This one sees them back in Spain (where Manifesta 5 transpired), looking at the dialogue between Europe and North Africa. There's a tripartite and hydra-headed curatorial team, a fairly hip/under-familiar list