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Innovators Burst Onstage One (Ka-pow!) at a Time

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ONE of the great things about New York City is that it really is new, all the time. Fresh ideas keep popping up; so do new faces. And some of those faces belong to artists. Not a month goes by without dozens of solo debuts among the city's hundreds of galleries. This month is no exception.

Any attempt at inclusive coverage of first-time shows is a hopeless task, which is why this survey sticks to Manhattan and still leaves worthy candidates out. Even so, the itinerary is guaranteed to give your shoes and Metrolink a serious workout and introduce you to some terrific new art.

CHELSEA: Far west Chelsea, neighborhood of high ceilings and hard floors, is the commercial center of the New York art world. Some still think of it as a luxury liner on a cruise to nowhere. But that doesn't matter. There are tons of money around these days, and people are buying art: one of these, one of those, whatever.

So it makes a certain symbolic sense in a high capitalist moment that an art of accumulation -- an art made up of many small, complicated parts -- is prevalent. The Guggenheim's hilariously tacky Armani retrospective, basically a jumbo installation piece, offers one example; Damien Hirst's faux-existentialist fun house at Gagosian in Chelsea is another. But even on a far more modest scale, the incremental impulse makes itself felt.

It takes a virtuosic form in the first full-scale local exhibition of the New York artist Sarah Sze at Marianne Boesky. Ms. Sze, 31, came on the scene in the late 90's and quickly gained international attention for site-specific sculptures made up of countless tiny, unattached objects -- screws, matches, toothpicks -- grouped in patterns that suggested computer boards and displays in a Job Lot store.

The seven pieces in the Boesky show have a more worked and organic look than what preceded them. Each is based on a single form, a piece of household furniture, that appears to have exploded in midair. Chair legs burst into splintery rosettes, and a broken-up bed zooms off into space. The fragments are connected networks of cables, clips and bentwood strips that create their own perspectival lines and scatter-shot patterns, suggesting associations with painting, drawing and digital design.

Also notable in Ms. Sze's new sculptures is their aggressive interaction with the gallery architecture. They eat away at jutting corners, bore into walls and push up against windows as if they were blocking passage or desperate to escape. In the process they point to all kinds of undefined dramas. Ms. Sze has obviously put a lot of thought and work into this show.

Are the results a little too polished, too ingenious, too "done"? Yes, but they also reveal an artist with talent to burn, pushing in new directions. Maybe now that the long-awaited-debut heat is off, she can relax, and those directions will become clear.

Accumulation takes a giddy, daredevil nose dive into abjection at Alleged Gallery, with the first American appearance of the Norwegian artist **Bjarne Melgaard**. Mr. Melgaard, 33, is one of Europe's current crop of post-Martin Kippenberg bad boys. His multimedia show, "The Mutilation of the Apes," packs in at least as much raw material as Ms. Sze's but keeps it raw and adamantly content-intensive.

What the content is, exactly, is hard to pin down. The "Planet of the Apes" theme, embodied in a life-size sculpture of space-suited apes engaged in homoerotic sex, is offered as an allegory for the dire consequences of certain kinds of political control. But beyond that, Mr. Melgaard leaves the details ambiguous, choosing instead to pump up a general sense of apocalyptic menace and, through references to race wars, child pornography and dubious cultural heroes, to push, almost randomly, a whole keyboard of hot buttons.

The show, organized by Stijn Huijts, director of the Museum Het Domein in the Netherlands, isn't a pretty picture, but its Goth-anarchist messiness (almost a house style for Alleged, one of Chelsea's best galleries) is a welcome antidote to the neat-as-a-pin, corporate-friendly art being turned out elsewhere.