

Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Tries Reality TV to Find 'the Next Great Artist'

Seven artists compete for an exhibition at the museum in a series it produced with MTV and the Smithsonian Channel.



By Robin Pogrebin

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2 MIN READ

“One of you will show your work at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and will take home \$100,000.”

At least that’s the promise made by Dometi Pongo, the host of a new reality television series, “The Exhibit,” about the making of an art star. The first season is six episodes, produced by the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn together with MTV and the Smithsonian Channel.

The program, which starts March 3, focuses on seven rising artists from around the country who were selected by Hirshhorn curators. Each week, the artists are commissioned to make a themed work — such as an exploration of gender — that is evaluated by Melissa Chiu, the Hirshhorn’s director, and a team of guest judges (the artists Adam Pendleton, Kenny Schachter and Abigail DeVille are among them).

“This TV partnership was really about an expansive idea of art — radical accessibility,” Chiu said in a telephone interview, adding that the show will be “bringing new light to artists and artwork.”



The show's host, Dometi Pongo, left, with three of its judges: Melissa Chiu, director of the Hirshhorn; Kenny Schachter, an artist and writer; and Keith Rivers, a Hirshhorn trustee and collector. via Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Photo by Shannon Finney



The artist Jennifer Warren inside Barbara Kruger's “Belief + Doubt” (2012) at the Hirshhorn Museum during filming. via Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Photo by Shannon Finney

Whether audiences find the making of art compelling television remains to be seen. Chiu said she hopes the show will help “demystify what it means to be an artist.”

The artists are Jamaal Barber, Misha Kahn, Frank Buffalo Hyde, Baseera Khan, Clare Kambhu, Jillian Mayer and Jennifer Warren.

The weekly series will feature artwork from the museum’s collection, including pieces by Harold Ancart and Jacqueline Humphries and an exhibit by Barbara Kruger. Chiu said the program was part of the museum’s mission to serve as “the national museum of modern art” and builds on its recent initiatives, including the revitalization of its Sculpture Garden with a design by Hiroshi Sugimoto that connects to the National Mall.

Recently, the museum also appointed the Colombian pop star J Balvin as a global cultural ambassador to work with teens in its Artlab education center. And the museum recently created the Hirshhorn Eye (Hi), which allows visitors to point their phones at a work of art and see a video of the artist talking about it.

Having the TV series broadcast on both MTV and the Smithsonian Channel (there are no plans to stream it) will allow the Hirshhorn to reach both “a younger demographic as well as a more mature demographic,” Chiu said, adding that she hoped the program would reveal more about “what the museum does, but also the artistic process.”