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Inside Art

Carol Vogel

Reconstructing Rome

It almost seems fitting that a show called "Younger Than Jesus," the New Museum's first triennial exhibition, featuring 50 artists who are (as the title implies) 33 or younger, would stage something called "Building Rome in a Day." Besides filling the museum's entire building, on the Bowery between Stanton and Rivington Streets on the Lower East Side, the show will include a 24-hour performance-turned-installation in which the Los Angeles artist Liz Glynn and her crew will actually try to construct a miniature version of the ancient

capital in 24 hours.

They will start at 6 p.m. on April 6 and continue until 6 the next evening, the event beginning with construction of the thatched hut of Romulus (from 753 B.C.) and ending with the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths (A.D. 410).

The performance will take place in the museum's glass-walled lobby gallery and can be seen only from the street or online through a Flickr photo feed accessed through the museum's Web site (newmuseum.org) or its Facebook page (facebook.com/pages/New-York-NY/New-Museum/12810599610). A video and Polaroids of the performance, as well as the final installation, will be included in the show, which opens on April 8.

Ms. Glynn conceived of the project in 2007, and a year ago a version of it was performed at Time Machine, an alternative art space in Los Angeles. Ms. Glynn said she did not set out to reconstruct Rome but rather to explore a possible project that dealt with what she described as "the potential for change."

"But the phrase 'You can't build Rome in a day' kept being bandied about politically, so I decided to try it," she said.

Ms. Glynn and the curators of "Younger Than Jesus" are gathering 100 volunteers for the project, enlisting friends and advertising on Facebook and the museum's Web site with the pitch "No prior construction experience or historical knowledge is necessary."

As three bands play at different climatic moments throughout the 24-hour cycle, the volunteers will use only salvaged materials and cardboard to try to cram some 1,100 years of history into about 400 square feet. They will re-enact invasions, fires and battles, and construct all of the major monuments and public buildings in historic order, scaled to the space.

Ms. Glynn said she would give the volunteers a topographical dictionary, indicating where to place the buildings, and a 16-page timeline based on nine months of research. When the empire finally falls, what will be left will be the ruins of a miniature cardboard civilization.

The idea is to examine "what it is for an empire to rise slowly at first and then be quickly destroyed," Ms. Glynn said.

Lauren Cornell, the museum's adjunct curator, said the project fit nicely with what a number of other artists in the "Younger Than Jesus" show have been doing recently. "Many of them have been re-envisioning history with these kind of haphazard personal narratives," she said. "It's participatory and cross-disciplined. And the remains are an installation with video documentation."