THE VELOCITY OF ART

German physicist Werner Heisenberg theorized that it was impossible to know both the position and the velocity of subatomic particles like electrons. One upshot of this "uncertainty principle" is that every concept has a meaning only in terms of the experiments used to measure it—something that might fairly be said of curating contemporary art.

"Uncertain States of America: American Art in the 3rd Millennium," opening June 25, at the Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS) museum at Bard College, presents the conundrum of a survey of recent developments in American contemporary art curated by a trio of Europeans—Daniel Ben-David, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Gunilla Kvarnström. First organized at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Art in Oslo, CCS is somewhat ironically the first American stop on its tour.

While there is much to be said for getting outside the confines for a better look at the fish, it remains to be seen whether "Uncertain States" fares any better than the year’s overly universally praised Whitney Biennial, another show curated by Europeans. How to summarize a country so big, so sprawling, with an art scene so diverse, so bereft of consistently canonical concepts or movements, in the traditional sense?

The curators allude to the difficulty in their press release, noting that the exhibition is not entirely American—"influences come from everywhere. It seems important to remind ourselves of this complexity. The Uncertain States of America are not only uncertain; they are many."

Ironically (or perhaps most fittingly), the Norwegian Airline company, sponsor of the show’s organizing museum, wants to weigh through international shipping and transportation systems, keeping things moving around the globe. Many of the works in the show are now in the collection of the A-F Museum—the show seems to have been a vehicle for some speculative collecting of contemporary American art by its director, curator Gunilla Kvarnström.

The global outlook is reflected in reflecting the constantly shifting "uncertain" arena. The most visiblegz}