



Dam, Stuhltrager Gallery . 38 Marcy Avenue . Brooklyn . NY . 11211 . Ph 718-387-9818 .
www.damstuhltrager.com . Info@damstuhltrager.com

DANGLING BETWEEN THE REAL THING AND THE SIGN IN THE WINDOW

For as long as I remember, I've dangled between the real thing and the sign in the window. Or, more precisely, that mammoth sign in that mammoth window with the legend written, 'The big time!' - excerpt from a 1973 address by Morton Feldman

The great hard-core avant-gardist composer was speaking at the University of Buffalo, where he had just relayed a story attributed to Kierkegaard:

. . . about a man who notices a large printed sign in a storefront window. On the sign is written, "We press clothes". So he goes back to his room, gathers up some suits and brings them to the store. "You've made a mistake," they said, "We don't press clothes here. We just print the sign in the window". Most likely, Kierkegaard was attacking Hegel for just giving us the sign and not the real thing. Now, the real thing in today's music, especially in today's music, is up for grabs . But I do know that our notions about what it could be or should be is probably just the sign in someone else's window.

The art world of today appears to be dangling between the real thing and the superficial. Barry Hoggard and James Wagner, the curators of this show, have invited a small diverse group of artists whose work is about what they think and feel, and whose artistic vision is not bent toward what they think the market wants this month or this year. This approach was rewarded in their experience working with Susan Dessel during the months she was creating the work installed weeks ago in the gallery's rear garden, when the pair become keenly aware of the difference between what the artist does and what is accomplished by someone who is only concerned with the surface of things.

The seven artists whose work is represented there, and in two rooms inside of the gallery beginning October 13, exhibit few similarities in their work, and share little in their backgrounds. They were also peculiarly distinct in the manner of their introduction to the curators. The range of medium, style and subject to be found in these spaces resists a simple characterization. The one common element may be simply the enthusiasm of their two paladins: Their own interests in the arts are not narrowly focused, although they will admit they are most easily provoked by work that addresses humor, conceptualism, history, politics and the unexpected, so long as there is an identifiable aesthetic. But this statement isn't about the curators at all; it's about the art.

Jaishri Abichandani draws personal and artistic inspiration from her immersion in the highly-

stylized and generally marginalized New York subculture of South Asian queers, activists, drag queens and cultural workers, many of them forced to seek asylum because of their sexual orientation. The images included here in the form of a print, a light box sculpture and a musical video represent a spectacular world of regularly-scheduled Desilicious parties with the same kind of commitment, affection and art which produced the greatest work of Brassai, Evans or Goldin.

Admittedly, Abichandani's subjects represent more dazzling material than is given to most photographers, but her art carries it far beyond documentary. Her extravagant images assume lives of their own and approach abstraction and even the sublime, regardless of their medium.

Ina Diane Archer's affection for film history inspires an art which addresses its representations of race, but the joy of her collages flows from a more personal impulse, what she describes as her "cinephilia, the cinematic 'gaze', and the implications of my emotional interaction with film and my 'crushes' on (male) stars". In a medium informed partly by her training as a jeweler, these iconic images are entangled in ornamentation which sometimes playfully incorporates her own image as well. The video shown here is a trailer which is part of "The Lincoln Film Conspiracy", a body of work with which Archer is able to re-imagine the early history of American commercial film - this time to include African-Americans as other than ciphers. In this project too Archer can't resist a fan's ultimate temptation, that of including herself in the work with obvious joy, in the midst of sorrow and anger for what never was. The "Lincoln Film Conspiracy" is supported in part by the Creative Capital Foundation.

Peter Corrie is usually identified with sinister-become-wacky colored pencil drawings which seem to be inspired by a cartoon world perhaps even more violent but much less inspired than his own tortured creatures. Many of the works also suggest exhilarating studies for large-scale monuments, and Corrie has regularly produced sculpture, although on a somewhat less than gargantuan scale. In fact, the artist doesn't seem happy with the confinement of two dimensions even in his drawings, judging by the imaginative frames he has fitted to some of them here. Corrie has written of the responsibility of the cartoon world for his questioning of psychological and physical space: "The rules of physics are bent just enough to place a "hole" onto a table and reach through it. Through the repetition and overlapping of imagery from drawing to sculpture to photography there is a feeling of proof that such a space exists One wonders if those classic animations weren't documentaries when looking at a spilled bucket of checkered paint."

Susan C. Dessel builds monuments to the essential humanity we all share, but it is a humanity that can assume a very ugly form. Her art is normally conceived as a public installation, whether or not site-specific. The full power of the artist's work, although clearly sculptural and sometimes even monumental, is only fully unleashed by those who experience it. In a statement which accompanied her piece in this year's Brooklyn College MFA thesis show she explained: "I feel that my art is successful if it elicits a connection in which the narrative belongs to the viewer." Late this summer Dessel wrote: "My recent work creates a dialog with prevailing icons, addressing how our increasingly-networked world has redefined the concepts of time, space, and distance. The site-specific nature of the gallery's sculpture garden was an opportunity for me to re-imagine the world as I understand it: our shared backyard." The installation behind the gallery totally re-defines the space; a garden becomes "OUR BACKYARD". Both its image and the reality it imagines remains after we leave it, and we are likely to be haunted by both even long after the work leaves the gallery.

Nicolas Garait works with existing or found materials to reorganize an increasingly complicated world. The video installation "28 Months" began with an existing, and literally "found", moving

(8mm film) image to which the artist attached a found sound track he assembled himself from archive materials. Garait has taken creative advantage of a double exposure mistake made with a "Double 8" format by someone, probably a member of the French military, who was filming in Algeria during the 1954-1962 War of Independence. He found a way to reveal the images which had been partially buried because of the filming error. Here in New York the artist has installed the double-projection video in the English-only version, using Universal News broadcast audio from the 50's. The title refers to the term of French military service during the Algeria War. The images are elegiacally beautiful and the sound dramatic and evocative, with a voice of disturbingly paternal assurance. The subject material however, tragic enough for itself, becomes many times more horrible as the announcer "repeats" much of the trigger words and the cant now being delivered by warriors almost two generations later.

Joy Garnett paints. Her work is based on photographs of man-made and natural disasters hungrily collected from news sources on the internet very often more for the power of the image than for any specific story it represents. The large canvas here is a recent work from the ongoing series, "Strange Weather", and because of its familiarity it's probably fair to say this striking piece is a significant exception to that general statement. The two smaller paintings are from a series based on photographs of the 2005 Paris riots pulled from e-zines and weblogs. The artist writes that in painting these familiar yet fleeting media images she "removes them from their mass-produced context, transforming them into visceral and contemplative objects; unreal-seeming images of environmental disaster and social unrest are re-cast as paintings where geological and political 'weather' are inextricably intertwined." Garnett's lush oils may just be more real than the documentary photographs from which they are drawn.

Jacques Louis Vidal may have no respect for the traditional decencies, but the intelligence of the colorful and sophisticated arcade-like construction installed here will almost certainly escape the scolds, developers, hucksters and carnies which can be found entwined all across the Duratrans. Vidal explains his current body of work and his contribution to this show: "I've been investigating the creation of monuments, and epicenters of entertainment. Where do these sorts of formal and architectural traditions meet? The idea of presenting the austere Vietnam Memorial next to say, the super-sized realism of a 'tea-cup ride,' might not have its time and a place, but I'm attracted to this tension, between public mourning and mass jubilation. In keeping with this idea I have created a taxonomy of sorts, maybe more an almanac, of religious and recreational internet-based imagery called 'The Holy Art Project: To Simply Slide 4 Eva.' It will be presented printed directly from the digital file onto a backlit box. Buttressing each side of the box will be the very faces of those having so much, and not so much fun cut from wood." Vidal is also represented here by some drawings from a series of "architectural proposals" featuring wooden roller coasters.