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ART & DESIGN

‘As We Were Saying’: ‘Art and Identity in the Age of “Post”’

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Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER



Artworks by Josh Kline (foreground) and Josh Faught (back wall) in “As We Were Saying.” EFA Project Space

In the art industry, today’s hot ideas are tomorrow’s cold potatoes, and fads change fast. Two decades ago, “identity politics” had a run before cycling out of fashion. But how far out of fashion did it really go? That’s a question asked by an exceptionally smart group show, organized by Claire Barliant at EFA Project Space, which picks up the old “difference” thread now.

What’s changed? Volume: quieter. Tone: hard to read. Form: unfixed. A sculpture called “In spirit of (a major in women’s studies),” by A. K. Burns and Katherine Hubbard, consists of a wastebasket filled with, among other things, a studded leather belt, an electrical power strip, confetti, plastic snakes and a rose made of feathers. Can you pull an identity out of all that? You can guess at one, or some, and that’s the point.

A loquacious piece titled “It Takes a Lifetime to Get Exactly Where You Are,” by the textile artist Josh Faught, includes strips of woven cloth, scraps of toilet paper, glitter, an image from the AIDS quilt and a jaunty straw hat. Everything says “not sad,” which is a form of sad.

Some of what’s here looks at history sideways. A wall collage by Suzanne McClelland, called “Furtive Gesture,” referring to stop-and-frisk police action, intersperses old news photographs of hugging, handshaking world leaders with others of running black figures, implicitly asking which should arouse more suspicion. Ignacio Lang joins pictures his father took as a soldier in Vietnam in 1968 with Playboy centerfolds and magazine ads from that year. Nikita Gale offers a witty form letter that makes self-definition by race or gender a fill-in-the-blank affair.

Three beautiful 3-D printed sculptural assemblages by Josh Kline, called “Cost of Living (Aleyda),” break down the figure of an office cleaning woman so that parts of her body lie side by side on pushcarts with her sponges and detergents.

Two videos are outstanding. For one called “[In Complete World](#),” made in 2008 just before the presidential election, Shelly Silver asked dozens of New Yorkers on the street some questions — Does equal opportunity exist in this country? Does global warming exist? — and edited the answers into a crazy quilt of passionately diverse opinion. And Lily Benson and Cassandra Guan brought together clips by about 50 artists to create an entrancing film biography of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927), one of Dada’s most radically disruptive figures, who was, in every department, as different as different could be.

In short, lots to think about. Let me add that for persuasive reading on the subject of why identity politics has never gone away, try Amelia Jones’s book “Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts” (Routledge, 2012). And, by all means, pick up the provocative exhibition handout Ms. Barliant has prepared for her fine show.

‘AS WE WERE SAYING’

‘Art and Identity in the Age of “Post” ’

EFA Project Space

323 West 39th Street, Manhattan

Through Oct. 25