

ARTFORUM

“179 Canal / Anyways”

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10.29.10-12.04.10 White Columns

If your memory still reaches back farther than your last Facebook login, recall the sizable crowd that attended “Recessional Aesthetics” at X Initiative in March 2009. Why such a turnout? Chalk it up to the tongue-in-cheek title, which intimated that—post-Lehman Brothers, post-Inauguration—a departure from business as usual was imminent. Something could crack open. But where? One viable answer presented itself that May, when 179 Canal inaugurated its remarkable run with “Nobodies New York.” As a month-to-month beneficiary of a soft real estate market, the gallery was inevitably short-lived, but as a crucible for ideas and attitudes it’s proving more persistent—ergo its current “anti-retrospective” at White Columns, curated by 179 Canal proprietor Margaret Lee and featuring new work from the space’s old hands.

In the absence of any official 179 Canal manifesto, the press release for “Nobodies New York” provides an aspartame substitute. “Everyone is finding new things to do with paint and three dimensional objects,” writes the exhibition’s organizer, Josh Kline. “This is in addition to everything else they are making on and off the job(s) with computers, cameras, and souped-up cell phones.” Distributed as a screenshot of a Gmail message, the text periodically lapses into workplace clichés (“Let’s touch base about this soon?”). Such slips into professional jargon are evidence of what Max Weber would call rationalization, but they also betray a dark humor. These artworks may fall within the traditional categories of medium-specificity, the slips imply, but they’re the products of impure minds.

Also, impure materials: Anicka Yi contributes a series of blank canvases that, on closer inspection, aren’t canvases at all but cast molds consisting of soap and “essential oils,” pharmacy items turned art supplies. A good indicator of 179 Canal’s roaming eccentricity emerges from these and other materials included on the exhibition’s checklist: mastic, neodymium magnets, dried pea, liquid urethane, shattered coconuts, microwave. Perhaps most resonant is the “plastic-infused water” in Kline’s For Your Health, 2010, a set of thirty Poland Spring bottles boiled until deformed by the heat of their own contents. Whereas “plastics” was once the single word that summed up social conformity and unappealing futures, “plastic-infused water” mimics the dispersed and barely perceptible sources of today’s anxieties: oil plumes, toxic assets, bedbugs. If “recessional aesthetics” is something more than a knowingly bad pun, it starts here, at the confluence of tenuously held real estate, fractured subjectivities, and contaminated wares.



From left: Josh Kline, Citizen Dick / Hurl Jam / Guess Jeans, 2010; Bravo Presents: Seattle Story, 2010; Facebook Friends, 2010; Canadian Brunettes, 2010. Floor: Josh Kline, For Your Health, 2010.