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"Notebook"

56 HENRY

The request was simple. The artist Joanne Greenbaum, the curator of this show at 56 Henry, asked each contributor for a "notebook drawing," defined as a work that they would "never show to a dealer or pull out during a studio visit." The notebook page is a site of experimentation; it affords a glimpse into the mind of the practitioner while s/he is dreaming and creating. Sheets of modest size—containing doodles, scribbles, diagrams, calculations—ripped from sketch pads, notebook drawings are typically studies for something else, or nothing at all. Their status as "art" is uncertain; this precariousness is part of their appeal.

There is a history of shows like this one. Mel Bochner's "Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art," held at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1966, presented artists' sketches and preparatory materials in alphabetical order in four identical binders. Exhibiting photocopies instead of originals, Bochner asserted that the processes of artmaking were as significant as the finished result.

Greenbaum's "Notebook" was also of its moment, covering the gallery's walls with some 160 drawings, collages, and photos, the majority of which were displayed in plastic sleeves. Many had been literally torn from notebooks, as the perforated edges revealed; most had been made recently. An ink-on-lined-paper work by Robert Goldman inciting one to steal it was dated 1991, indicating that nobody had yet dared to take up this suggestion; Robert Moskowitz's undated list of supplies and his exhibition catalogues inscribed over a watercolor of a windmill looked much older. Some contributions were unabashedly referential, such as Wayne Gonzales's cartoon of a yellow-haired Donald Trump with bloody lips, or Pam Lins's gouache of the president signing an order surrounded by yes-men and one woman, all faceless. Patricia Cronin's depiction of a creepy-looking bald man, executed in bleach on paper, called to mind any number of CEOs or powerful politicians (Dick Cheney for one). Sounding a more somber note were Scott Covert's elegiac tombstones for lovers Samuel Wagstaff Jr. and Robert Mapplethorpe, as well as those for divas Gloria Swanson and Ethyl Eichelberger, and a collage by David Colman, bursting with mementos: an old watchband, fan photos of gay heartthrobs Montgomery Clift and Johnny Weissmuller, a decal with the number 3, a dinner card with the artist's name, and an old election button declaring VOTE NIXON FOR PEACE (the mendacity of this inscription comes as no surprise during our own MAGA moment).

Some of the works were beautifully made: Hermine Ford's gouache of tessera marks was inspired by the mosaics of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Others were notations of process: Richard Tinkler's drawing mapped the development of a painting series (bearing the R. H. Quaytman–like designation BOOK V, VOLUME I) in a methodical sequence of shapes and colors. Susan Wanklyn's painting on paper contained notes of inspiration (WHY AM I THINKING OF COURBET['S] *LADY WITH A PARROT*, RUBENS (SCALE), MONET (JAPANESE BRIDGE, SEASCAPE), JUDD, evoking the Minimalist sculptor in its cadmium-red light abstract imagery. Kevin Zucker wrote out the names of other hotels on Coral Palace Hotel stationery, each associated (in Zucker's mind) with hermetic or nefarious connections: Under the elegant VIOLE D'OR we read FLAGS OF MONEY LAUNDERING STATES; under the banal brand name WESTIN (NOT SPECIFIED) we find the headline SCIENTOLOGY ROLE IN FAILED 1972 MOROCCO COUP. Mark Lombardi once transformed such conspiratorial connections into an original kind of drawing that revealed the unseen vectors driving political power. One hopes that Zucker's citations will also yield a substantive aesthetic form.

Separated by more than a half century, Greenbaum's and Bochner's shows represented distinct cultural moments and communities. Overtly a presentation of the techniques of Minimalists and Conceptualists, Bochner's "Working Drawings" had a more implicit content: the social habitus of artists such as Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt, who resided near one another in Lower Manhattan. Surveying Greenbaum's lively presentation, one could sense the myriad personal connections embodied by these works of modest size and execution. This was the crux of the matter: Despite the city's rising unaffordability under the inexorable pressures of global capitalism, artists still manage, against the most insurmountable odds, to live and work in New York.

—*James Meyer*