

ARTFORUM



Monument to the truth, Ester Partegàs, 2005

“MAKE IT NOW” SCULPTURE CENTRE

SculptureCenter's "Make It Now: New Sculpture in New York" arrived hot on the heels of two other exhibitions that purported to clue us in about the country's two big art scenes: P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center's bloated "Greater New York 2005" and the UCLA Hammer Museum's "THING: New Sculpture from Los Angeles." While hardly perfect, "Make It Now" outdid its predecessors in one unexpected way: It plotted clear connections between the substance of local art and the environment in which it's made. From Ester Partegàs's tarp-covered, boarded-off *Monument to the Truth*, 2005, in the center's yard, which echoed adjacent condo developments, to Bryan Savitz's *Submissive Compressions*, 2005, a set of fanciful cityscapes made of discarded fruit and vegetable cartons--that is to say, from witty conceptualism to BFA-grade monkeying-around--the show's concern with a recrudescence of form and tradition fell away in favor of a portrait of New York as an actual place rather than as a mere node in a global system.

In a way, SculptureCenter made the perfect site for such a show. Located next to an auto-repair shop in Queens, the building is a former trolley-repair shop last used as a factory for roll-down steel doors. The building's towering brick and metal interior--along with the narrow corridors of its basement--invoke the postindustrial spaces that have housed the New York art scene for forty-odd years, and the sooty, scavenged air native to such settings helped to unite disparate modes of production: Fritz Welch's intricate progression of forms and processes rendered in iodine, wire, dust, glitter, fabric, found graffiti-sprayed wood paneling, and more; Seth Price's hostage-execution images, downloaded from the Internet and silk-screened onto crumpled clear polyester film; SOL'SAX's life-size, clothed ceramic-and-wire figures of African Americans,

with the gangsta and the glamorous alike hung unnervingly upside down. Given the cheap materials used in so many of the works and the strong presence of black artists, "Make It" dared imply that being "now" in New York might just mean being broke and even nonwhite. There's a rebuke to Chelsea in there somewhere.

Unfortunately, the show inadvertently highlighted one advantage of the gallery district's formal showrooms: The venue's big open shell can be hostile to a multi-artist display. Despite relatively ample space, the works in the exhibition felt crammed together. Like a shower in the kitchen, this discord may have been an apt theatricalization of the scarcity of New York square footage, but it often served individual pieces poorly: Price's works, for example, were easily ignored; and Nicole Cherubini's god-ugly furred and bejeweled glazed urns might have been more engaging had their placement near the door not made them seem more like obstacles than artworks.

A pairing of works downstairs formed a kind of pendant whereby "Make It Now" made the most of the bohemian visions of youth. During my last visit to the show, Nancy Hwang was performing: lying cosily in bed with a stranger who'd answered an ad in the Village Voice, red-stained wine glasses within arms' reach. Perhaps the piece is silly, but the pair's hushed patter gave the must and dust a welcome human spark. Meanwhile, a nearby video documented an action by Klara Hobza in which she installed bright lights in the museum's clerestory and flashed them on and off in Morse code sequences. Filmed in part from passing subway cars, cutting to close-ups of a goggle-wearing Hobza manhandling an archaic switching device, it's a deceptively smart work that binds together the erotics of silent communication, a love of '70s Conceptual art both self-conscious and genuine, and a love of New York. It's also smart enough to make this last romance seem legit--the kind of work that even in 2005 the city still deserves.

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