



5 + 5 WASHINGTON

proclamations—fill the upper right hand corner. These broadcast slogans like “A Jew does not banish a Jew”—a right wing catchphrase that gained popularity during the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Using the *pashkevalim*, Karabelnikov contextualizes this image in a particular place and time—a hot summer in Jerusalem as the orthodox community exploits a national holiday to mobilize against the impending pull-out. Despite this possible reading, we can’t quite ascertain whether Karabelnikov sides with these women and their political agenda or criticizes them for their fundamentalist zeal. A secular Israeli, for example, would not simply take the *pashkevalim* and stickers at face value. She would also be reminded of the rap band HaDag Nachash’s politically-charged *Sticker Song*, which played constantly on the radio in the summer of 2005, stringing together the hundreds of slogans that flooded the public sphere in a rally for peace. This doubling makes Karabelnikov’s intention even more ambiguous. The fact that she inserts herself into her own picture does not make matters any more evident, as we are left to ponder whether we are supposed to sympathize with the orthodox community or condemn it.

While the viewer may want to know where Karabelnikov stands in relation to her subject matter, it might be her inclination to leave the works unresolved that makes them so compelling. Indeed, the power of Karabelnikov’s images is their oscillation between an objective documentation of a population whose customs elicit both curiosity and censure and a subjective representation of her conflicted stance towards this same community.

—Nuit Banai

Portraits come in many guises. Made of paint strokes, a string of words or a live performance, they speak about persons, places or things. Group exhibitions that seek to capture the inherent dynamism of a specific locale, such as *5 + 5* [Ann Loeb Bronfman Gallery; February 15—May 13, 2007], are also portraits. Shirking consensus in terms of medium, style, period or theme, the exhibition successfully brings together an engaging and multifaceted selection of work by a wide range of artists, from the rarely exhibited to those holding international reputations.

Mounted in celebration of the DC Jewish Community Center’s tenth anniversary, the exhibition’s stated purpose was to examine the interwoven history of the Center’s building [the gallery’s home], the local artistic community, and the city itself. To achieve this, guest curator Phyllis Rosenzweig set out on a potentially risky curatorial process. Long cognizant of artists’ appreciation of other artists’ work, she initiated a two-tiered process, which this exhibition’s title reflects. After selecting five artists working in or closely associated with the DC area, she gave each one the task of selecting another. Surprisingly, neither the artists’ choices nor the sequence in which their works were installed in the gallery offered any obvious clues as to who had chosen whom.

If not for the informative catalogue, it would have been impossible to guess that John Gossage, whose recent black and white photographs take mundane settings in Memphis and turn them into exciting visual documents, would have chosen the work of Pia Calderon, an artist who produces small, delightfully colorful sketches juxtaposing handwriting, calligraphy, and figurative elements. Neither did it seem likely that Dan Steinhilber, the second youngest of the ten artists, would choose Y. David Chung, an artist many years his senior. While an urban sensibility and autobiographical content do inform both men’s work, Steinhilber’s care-

fully situated, broken fluorescent tube—a remnant of his former studio—offers no obvious relationship to Chung’s culture-bridging drawings blending conventional Oriental landscape elements with generic American architecture.

Commenting on the exhibition’s outcome, Rosenzweig herself noted that, if a trend were to be identified, it would be the artists’ inclinations to appreciate work standing in opposition to their own. Witness the work of Jae Ko [Sam Gilliam’s pick], that of Mary Early [singled out by Renee Stout], and Otho Branson [Martin Puryear’s selection]. Ko’s matte and monochromatic sculptures of medium-soaked swirls of adding machine paper stand in contrast to Gilliam’s *Atlantis*, 2005, a rectilinear, hinged, birch panel construction accented with rivulets and slathers of luminous color.

Mary Early engages in a soft type of minimalism, whereas Renee Stout assumes the persona of Fatima Mayfield, an herbalist and fortune-teller. Early’s two cylindrical structures of wood and beeswax vaguely resemble upright pieces of farm equipment while they firmly censure any sense of industrial production. These seemed miles away from Stout’s series of haunting drawings and bejeweled glass bottles that potentially hold strange oils or a person’s breath. Similarly, the conceptual distance between Otho Branson’s modest, methodical, and playful painted pairings and Puryear’s bold architectural form is anything but short. The presence of grids in both men’s work marks a feeble point of connection.

Seen without reference to the catalogue, the exhibition attests to the vitality of the local scene and the existence of a myriad of tangentially oriented relationships between artists or their works. Examples of this include Calderon’s *Resonance*, 2003, the depiction of a structural shape that echoes Early’s sculpture *Untitled*, 2007, and Stout’s *Dream Number 3*, from the series *Fatima’s Dreams*, 2004, where an image of dentures inside a wire cage recalls Puryear’s rarely seen *Untitled*, 1973, a

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Mary Early**, *Untitled*, 2006, wood and beeswax, 26 x 25 x 25 inches (courtesy of the artist and Hemphill Fine Art, Washington, DC); **Dan Steinhilber**, *Untitled*, 2007, six-foot fluorescent light bulb, variable dimensions (courtesy of the artist)

threatening garden of pointed wooden stakes gathered under a wire dome. Fascination with the manipulation of ordinary materials is another shared notion, as exemplified by the work of Steinhilber and Ko. Steinhilber's light tube surprises visitors who initially think that it may have fallen from the gallery's ceiling. After discovering the absence of any fluorescent fixtures, however, their consideration turns to its deliberate angled placement and pulverized middle. A sense of disorientation also infuses Ko's wall and floor sculptures. The textures of the coiled paper suggest that they may have been produced on the wheel while their stretched or sagging appearance reminds us of the effect of gravity on wet clay.

While much of the exhibition's vigor stemmed from the choice of artists and the intelligent selection and installation of their work, it also functioned as a reference, asserting two truly positive aspects of the city's artistic community: its openness and inherently diverse nature. An additional, exciting feature of *5 + 5* was the exposure it gave Pia Calderon and DC native Otho Branson. While both have been at work for decades, this exhibition marks Calderon's debut and Branson's first hometown exhibition. As a portrait, *5 + 5* provided a remarkable snapshot of this city's artistic talent.

—John Gayer

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Willie Bester**, *Trojan Horse II*, 1994, mixed media (installation view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Gilbert and Lila Silverman, Detroit)