

PRESSBOOK

John HENDERSON

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‘Idea Is the Object’

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

D’Amelio Gallery

525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 24

Taking its title from the 17th-century British philosopher John Locke, “Idea Is the Object” features the variously reality-based efforts of 14 artists from the United States and Europe. Veering between routine and impressive, it has been organized by Tracy Parker, a curatorial assistant in contemporary art at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Pavan Segal, a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

“Idea is the object of thinking,” was Locke’s exact phrase, and it reflects his thesis — a wellspring of empirical philosophy — that human knowledge is based entirely on experience of the world, its events and materials. Implicit in this is the notion that the material world is full of ideas awaiting human extrapolation and, perhaps, use by artists.

That is what happens in this show, anyway, which might also have been titled “Further Adventures in Appropriation and/or Collage,” since the works on hand almost invariably rearrange bits of reality. In a 2005 slide-projection piece that is belated yet timelier than ever, Sharon Hayes has herself photographed in the Wall Street area holding a sign urging ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, while nearby Amalia Pica has taped confetti to the floor, implying a state of permanent festiveness or disarray. Mitzi Pederson, Jacob Dahl Jurgensen, John Henderson, Henrik Olai Kaarstein and Andreas Eriksson investigate forms of two-dimensional abstraction, and even painting, using materials with forthright, often deconstructive directness. Deborah Ligorio, Andy Boot and, most impressively, Mateo Tannatt assemble or simply arrange existing images, materials or objects. In three color photographs Kathrin Sonntag considers the visual echoes between green plants and a green belt.

The selection is bracketed by two excellent videos. Candice Breitz’s “Factum Tremblay”

(2009) is a dual-channel digital video in which gay female identical twins recount coming out to each other, their farming family's reaction to their homosexuality, and other experiences of otherness, like growing up as French Canadians in English-speaking Ontario. The brilliantly edited (implicitly collagelike) back-and-forth between the identically dressed women transcends documentary, forming an intricately layered meditation on difference that has the rhythm of a performance.

In the 2007 work "Stealing Beauty," the artist Guy Ben-Ner inserts himself, along with his wife, their two children and some video cameras, into the furniture displays of an Ikea store. Moving among the displays, they conduct a reasonable facsimile of family life. Dishes are done, discipline imposed, discussions held (private property is a topic), and everyone tucks in for the night — in numerous beds — as Ikea's other customers wander through.

A fiction staged within a larger fiction, Mr. Ben-Ner's video implies with particular sharpness the show's underlying idea (or object): that the world is ripe for, and better understood through, the form of thinking that is art.

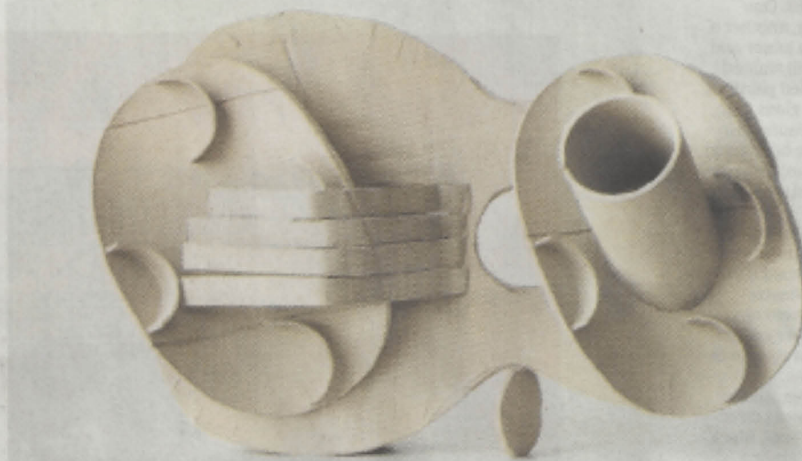
This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: August 4, 2012

An art review on Friday about "Idea Is the Object," at the D'Amelio Gallery in Manhattan, referred incorrectly to the organizers of the show, Tracy Parker and Pavan Segal. They are not married.

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Art in Review



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WALLSPACE, NEW YORK

Above, Ricky Swallow's "Reclining Guitar With Dials," part of "The Mystery Trend," a group show at Wallspace in Chelsea. Below right, the ceramic artist Ron Nagle's "Permanent Member."

'The Mystery Trend'

Wallspace
619 West 27th Street, Chelsea
Through Aug. 3

"The Mystery Trend," a group show at Wallspace, takes its title from the Bay Area band of the ceramic artist Ron Nagle, who also serves as the eminence grise of this five-artist gathering. The intimate scale and deliberation of his high-backed objects set the tone. Their tiny forms waver among suggestions of furniture, tombstones and something more fleshy. Their rippling surfaces evoke both upholstery and skin, and exploit subtly visceral contrasts between matte and shiny textures, and dark and iridescent colors.

On each work a drip or pool of gleaming near-black oozes forth, signaling the possibility of life — or at least chemical activity — within.

None of the other artists here equals Mr. Nagle's originality, but then he is their senior by at least 35 years. Even so, everything makes an impression, including the winsome gestural paintings of Patricia Treib, with their intimations of abstract calligraphy, and the pressed-to-the-wall gray reliefs of Noam Rappaport, with their economical, self-evident structures and materials. Ricky Swallow, abandoning the hyper-realism for which he is known, presents three small sculptures and one wall relief in patinated bronze that argue con-

vincingly and wittily for a self-consciously Cubist vocabulary, as suggested by a work titled "Reclining Guitar With Dials." The youngest member of the group, John Henderson, contributes three color photographs — all titled "Flowers" — of elegantly smudgy, if generic, abstract paintings hanging on walls, adding somewhat to the entwined traditions of setup photography, still life and pictures within pictures, while operating in the gap between related images by Louise Lawler and Leslie Hewitt.

In all, it would seem that "the mystery trend" here is a kind of inspired, sometimes vaguely figurative formalism in which the personal, the eccentric and the historical mingle in refreshing,



quietly exuberant ways. The prevailing lucidity and emotional groundedness reflects artists making things they urgently want to see. ROBERTA SMITH