

L. Guyton\Walker, *Untitled* (from the series: *Guyton\Walker: Empire Strikes Back*), 2006; silkscreen and digital inkjet print on canvas, thirty-eight paint cans, one digital inkjet print on canvas; overall dimensions variable

R. Douglas Boatwright, *Yes, or Fuseline* (detail), 2009; charcoal dust, pigment, pastel, Bentonite clay, talc, bee pollen; dimensions variable; courtesy Harris Lieberman, New York

NEW YORK

No Bees, No Blueberries Harris Lieberman

Buzzing with metaphors, *No Bees, No Blueberries* was one of the only summer group shows to directly acknowledge the angst hovering over New York's hard-hit gallery scene. The title, borrowed from a participating artist (Andrea Blum), alludes to a cause-and-effect scenario of environmental devastation. Here, curators Sarina Basta and Tyler Coburn redeploy the idea to point to current trends in the art market, which, if not yet suffering from full-on "colony collapse disorder," is certainly stinging from the economic downturn.

Artists operate a lot like bees—they are industrious, social, promiscuous, attuned to patterns and crafty. Featuring more than forty artists, *No Bees, No Blueberries* is a veritable hive of painting, sculpture, installation, video and process- and performance-based works from the past decade, all packed into the various rooms of Harris Lieberman's SoHo space. The show's strength is in emphasizing just how important social organization and "buzz" are to contemporary art production and the survival of the art world as we've come to know it.

The notion of one artist/one work has all but been discarded over the last decade. While duos and collectives have yet to be tarred with the "art by committee" label that undermines public art projects, I find much work produced collectively to be too clever by half—processed, resolved and overwrought to a high degree but lacking the insight or even singular voice that an artist working alone can tap.

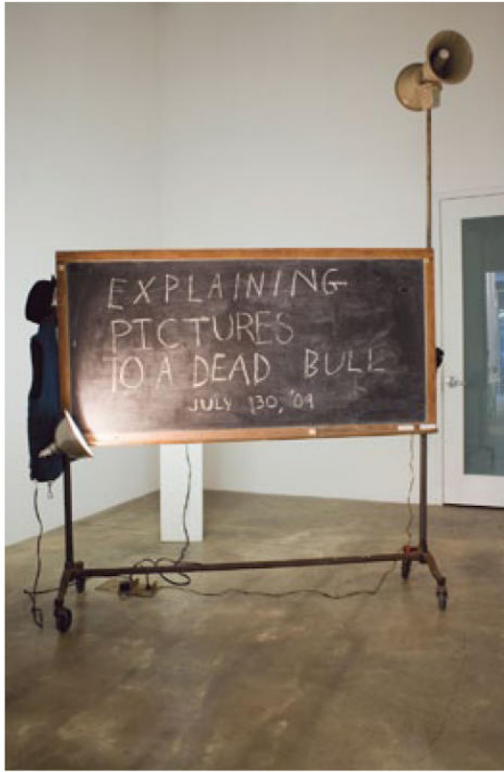
The collective phenomenon is evident here. Peter Simensky's *Neutral Capital Collection II* is a sort of artists' swap meet. A literal trunk show, the work consists of a shipping crate that unfolds to display small works by fifteen other artists including Patty Chang, Daniel Lefcourt and Charlotte

Beckett, whose silver sculpture is part robot, part respiring Jiffy Pop container. The Bruce High Quality Foundation contributed *Explaining pictures to a dead bull*, an installation combining a chalkboard and slides of Beuys projected onto a *Vanity Fair* photo of Bernie Madoff.

Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker, solo artists who also work as Guyton\Walker, are represented with *Untitled*, a scary mixed-media painting of a knife and a Ketel One vodka ad, resting unframed on a configuration of stacked paint cans. Guyton\Walker's signature trope suggests the material/idea dichotomy of artistic production, if not something intrinsic about the duo's process. There are works by other collectives, including DAS INSTITUT (*Untitled*, large sheets of stickers stacked à la Felix Gonzalez-Torres) and SALOON (*Friends There Are No Friends*, a project in the gallery's back room with performance, music on CD and various presentation materials such as spray-painted posters, foil covered walls and video).

Given the art world's striking proliferation of collaborative work, one might conclude that today's young artists prefer to work, if not by committee, then at least in a sociable group—a hive, of sorts. If so, it is a significant evolution from the tortured painter toiling alone in a garret, and probably reflects the explosion of MFA programs, artist residencies, art fairs, prizes and biennials—as well as large-scale projects where artists, institutions and even cities collaborate (i.e., Richard Florida's conceit that creativity drives development). The art world seems more sociable now than it has ever been.

Which isn't to say there aren't some wonderful, wacky loners in *No Bees, No Blueberries*. Martha Colburn's demented, hilarious videos from the late nineties featuring stop-motion animation and home movies are



- L. The Bruce High Quality Project, *Explaining pictures to a dead bull*, 2009; installation view; photo by Tyler Coburn
- R. Karin Schneider, *OO (circles...)*, 2009; two acrylic paintings, hook, wood stick, book; dimensions variable; courtesy Harris Lieberman, New York

personal in-jokes that nonetheless entertain, such as the turpentine-sniffing girl and cat-eating rooster of *I Can't Keep Up*. Nearby, Kim Seob Boninsegni's smallish, ink-on-paper drawings have a doodlelike vibe but are a sophisticated mash-up of global pop-culture, decorative motifs and lettering in various languages. Also wonderful and very funny are the five offset poster prints by Heman Chong—brightly colored announcements for fictitious college lectures in crisp modernist graphic design and sans serif type. Taking place at the made-up "Department of Future Fictions, Redhill College of Singapore," one lecture is titled "Common Sense About Networks: Hostile post-apocalyptic worlds and community building."

More serious—and seriously elegant—is Karin Schneider's *OO (circles...)*, a pair of small, gray-painted canvases, each with a circular hole cut in the center. One hole reveals a book resting behind, on the support (The Invisible Committee's controversial tract on the collapse of capitalism, *The Coming Insurrection*). Through the other hole, a long dowel rod fastened to the wall reaches up from behind and penetrates the picture plane, setting the canvas slightly askew and evoking Charles Ray's *Plank Piece* and Serra's *Prop*. Also impressive and workmanlike (make that worker bee) are Karl Haendel's *Walead #2*, a stunning, large pencil-on-paper work depicting what look like geometric facets of mirror with reflections and shadows; and Douglas Boatwright's *Yes, or Fuseline*, composed of pigmented bee pollen that runs throughout the gallery in the crevices of the scored concrete floor.

Hives, supportive or restrictive, are also suggested in various works. Andrea Blum's *BabyBoom Project* is a poster-sized, computer-generated image of a modular housing design—honeycomb-shaped units in "print & peel" vinyl for easy rearrangement. Chong's *Kryptonite* is a gorgeous,

looming polygon in striated green composed of 3,000 stickers stuck to the wall above the gallery reception desk. As a more ominous metaphor, the hive also turns up in Nicolás Guagnini's *State of the Art*, a corner display of altered museum exhibition posters from the Whitney, MoMA, etc. From these, circles have been cut, rotated or rearranged to disrupt the overall image, which in each case is tagged with a standard grade-school stencil of letters and digits. This "by the numbers" critique of art-world hierarchies and commercialism is echoed in Luciano Perna's *Art Basel/Dealer's Furniture-HL set*, four photographs of gallery fat cats lounging on Barcelona chairs amid art-fair displays.

Speaking of fat cats, *No Bees, No Blueberries* features works by art-world luminaries John Baldessari and Allen Ruppersberg. However, their contributions are overshadowed by queen bees in a painting standoff. On one side of the gallery, Ann Craven's clever *Hello, Hello, Hello* is a triptych of three large canvases, each presenting a near-identical image of a parrot in a flowering tree. The "dumb" quality of the image and the handling of the paint sets up the artist's joke about mimicry and pandering. Across the gallery, the overrated Olivier Mosset punches back with *Untitled*, a six-by-six-foot tondo in deep, mouthwatering blue that has genuine ego presence amid the exhibition's overall piddling-size works. Voilà: the blueberry!

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