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Off the Wall

Hunter College/Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery

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Though the formal orthodoxies of painting and sculpture were transgressed long ago, the curatorial impulse to revisit the topic of 'genre-bending' is an evergreen favourite. In that vein, *Off the Wall* is a studious selection of work by four rather nimble emerging artists for whom the wall is a point of departure, not a destination, and serves as a staging area for all manner of material and art-historical refutations.

Diana Cooper's *The Emerger* (2005) is a chaotic composition of two- and three-dimensional gestures constructed from foamcore, paper, felt and map pins. Flowerlike designs and other cut-paper graphics intermingle with stacked blocks within a delicate armature of grid forms. The whole system – pulled together by a unified palette of pink, red and grey – progresses down the wall and onto the floor but nonetheless relates to the wall's planar surface as the work's fundamental orientation. Cooper displays an affinity for systems and an impulse to stack and build, à la Sol LeWitt, but rigorous organization is overridden by a stronger impulse to depict abstract forms pictorially.

With hokey charm, Taylor McKimens depicts hairy, blob-like figures in country settings. Taking a cue from Claes Oldenburg, McKimens treats the surface of his constructions with a cartoon skin of brightly painted paper and line-drawn features. The effect softens the objects, displacing them into a formal nether region somewhere between two-dimensional illustration and solid form. An untitled installation features a knick-knack shelf of family photos and a goofy, useless extension chord draped across the gallery. These quirky images and homey aesthetic draw from rich sources of subversive Americana, including Philip Guston and R. Crumb.

Peter Scott takes a more straightforward approach to illusion, which is to say that his photographs of what appear to be mirrors are pure artifice. The

'mirrors' are actually framed shadow boxes containing near-black paintings set deep into the wall. One such shadow box is installed in the gallery. It takes some doing, but one can peer through the reflective glass to the painting behind, which in this particular case is a faint, pulp-fiction-like image of a man choking a woman. Opposite this installation are photographs of five of the shadow-box mirror/paintings placed in assorted, tasteful interiors. The almost imperceptible presence of a latent image in the reflection is initially jarring yet ultimately a toothless gimmick.

Isidro Blasco also works with photography as a perceptual field to be torqued and twisted. In *Kitchen* (2005), Blasco fragments photographic views of this domestic setting into individual facets that are then mounted onto a complicated wooden scaffold. This architectural form allows Blasco to assert the photographic image as a hefty, three-dimensional object that physically wraps around the viewer. Ideally, a video of the same setting is projected onto a wall behind the wooden armature, creating an engaging dialogue of contrasts – here, a monitor placed on the floor next to the work is a disappointing substitute.

Sarah Oppenheimer's *Screen* (2005) is perhaps the most lucid of the show's 'genre-bending' works. Plastered flush with the wall, it features elegant rows of oblong perforations that serve as both a lovely minimalist composition and a means to view the street on the other side of the wall. Highlighting artful 'found' qualities in contemporary building materials, Oppenheimer pierces the flat skin of innocuous spaces to reveal a more interesting dimension within.

Though smart, balanced and chock-full of aesthetic questioning, *Off the Wall* might have nonetheless benefited from more of the title's other sense, for going a little bonkers can invigorate moribund art practices, too. JE

