

“Looking Back: The 6th White Columns Annual”

WHITE COLUMNS

The line between community and clique is a fine one, and this highly idiosyncratic year-end review of goings-on about town walked it with a conspicuous wobble. Curated by artists Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss, the exhibition dipped into a variety of overlapping, interrelated New York scenes, with results that were at times intriguing, at others too hermetic to have much appeal beyond their own circles. Never intended as a definitive best-of, but rather as a review of works encountered by the curators in the course of twelve months of NYC art-viewing, the annual is a snapshot of personal preference, not an all-bases-covered summing-up. And while at its best this can provide a refreshing alternative to wider-ranging surveys such as the Whitney Biennial, it can also make some viewers feel left out.

In the gallery's first room, at least, Okiishi and Mauss kept obscurity at bay by featuring a virtual restaging of a single show, “Transeuphoria,” an assembly of work by transgender artists that was on view at the Lower East Side's Umbrella Arts gallery at the start of 2011, resulting in a coherent overview of this particular group. And though many of the works in isolation had an amateurish vibe, the sense of mutual struggle and support emphasized by their collective display was palpable and affecting. As Chloe Dzubilo put it in one 2008 drawing, following a list of everyday trials and tribulations: WHEN YOUR A TRANSEXUAL. AIN'T NOTHING LIKE KNOWING TRIUMPH OVER ALL THESE ADVERSITIES.

Another successful gathering, albeit of a very different sensibility, was a group of photographs by Margaret Lee, made in collaboration with assorted friends. Each of these small color shots highlights an aspect of its coproducer's aesthetic: In *10 Tips for Painting Your Miami Home*, 2010, a naked member of the collective K. Mustermann helps Lee select colors from an array of gleaming tins, while in *Darren's Chair*, 2011, made with Ajay Kurian, a coral-pink recliner, dressed up in boots, becomes a makeshift plant pot. Viewers familiar with the



Margaret Lee and
Ajay Kurian, *Darren's
Chair*, 2011, color
photograph, 7 x 5".
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composer-performer Charlemagne Palestine bantering with the crowd after a gig at NUMINA *lente*. (The virtual inaudibility of the latter was a practical problem shared by a recording of writer Pierre Guyotat's chat with *A Boy's Own Story* author Edmund White at New York University.)

While such privileging of the overlooked and marginalized revealed curators with hearts in the right place—and an eye on White Columns' founding mission—it also suggested an overestimation of the power of certain inclusions to communicate unaided. It looked like something fun might have been happening in Grand Openings' video of improvised shenanigans at MOMA, for example, but what, exactly? And, perhaps even more important, on whose behalf?

—Michael Wilson