

Artists Space

COMMITTEE FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC.
105 HUDSON STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013

ON ART

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Detail from Philip Smith's *Bring*

Pictures and Statements

William Zimmer

Pictures — Artists Space, 105 Hudson Street (through October 29)

In talking about his work, de Kooning once asserted that content was a very tiny thing, "an encounter like a flash." The work of the five artists in *Pictures* features objects that are recognizable enough to satisfy the most literal-minded, but often the appearance of things we can name occurs in vast empty fields that are annexed from the abstract painting of the last decade. The content is often tiny but as honed-in-on as a blip on a radar screen that's scanning the whole world for information.

You get the feeling that the things in *Pictures* are held in suspension from the flux, that what you see are specimens out of many possibilities. Pictures sometimes mean movies, as in moving pictures, and often what we get is like a frame from a larger whole. Movies, both experimental and Hollywood, are the inspiration for much of this art. A storyboard is a favored format and Jack Goldstein is showing some actual films (one is two minutes of the MGM lion). Goldstein has also recorded sound effects, a German Shepherd barking or a murder occurring, which he presents as records; from this aural matter we get the picture. Sherrie Levine's *Sons and Lovers* is silhouettes of Washington, Lincoln, Kennedy, an unknown woman

and a couple summoned up on graph paper. We compose the narrative from the 36 panels which dictate a historical soap opera. Robert Longo has fashioned a relief sculpture of enamel on cast aluminum, featuring seven aspects of the same galloping cowboy from *Missouri Breaks*. It displays a debt to Muybridge.

T.S. Eliot (you can refer to anybody in the diffuse world of *Pictures*) asserted that the essence of modernism is an "amalgamation of disparate experience." Philip Smith bears this out bravely in his incongruous imagery. In contrast to Smith's jammed fullness, Troy Brauntuch presents discrete images that become mysterious and compelling by their placement or strange captioning.

The exhibition is accompanied by a provocative catalog by organizer Douglas Crimp. He can telescope time and treat this ironic new art of imagery as part of a tradition. It is a stunning commentary on the rapid dissemination of information in the art world that pertinent forebearers such as John Baldessari, Joel Schapiro and Jon Borovsky can have an authoritative old master status instead of being discussed as figures of controversy themselves. Their work is illustrated in the catalog's margins. One might go further back to Jasper Johns, who worked with the disembodied object in what Greenberg called "homeless representation," and the myriad influences of the whole world upon an individual artist, which was the theory behind abstract expressionism.

A grant from the National Distillers and Chemical Corporation will permit *Pictures* to really move. It will be a traveling exhibition, something usually possible only for a museum.

D. James Doe