

“The Manhattan Art Review”

Chantal Akerman, Harold Ancart, Jef Geys, Dan Graham, Bodys Isek Kingelez, Robert Lebeck, An-My Lê, Otobong Nkanga, Marina Pinsky, Claudia Peña Salinas, Adam Simon, Momoyo Torimitsu, Hil Yeh - Hearts and Minds - Carriage Trade - ****.5

Speaking of art doing something, this show is a great example in that it's one of the exceedingly rare examples of a good political art show. This is materialist/documentary/archival as opposed to ideological/dogmatic, oriented towards showing the world as it is in a way that leads one to identify injustice and formulate an ideological perspective instead of presenting a predetermined value judgment on a silver platter. Control, propaganda, plants, sex, media, administration, rebellion, architecture, these are simply facts of our existence that must be made sense of in some way to make life navigable. The fact of the matter, though, is that life is simply unnavigable for many due to these forces conspiring to deceive and maintain their opacity to the general public. Political analysis comes from understanding of a political context, and understanding comes from observation. You can read every volume of *Capital*, hell, even the *Grundrisse*, but if you can't apply those ideas to the real existent facts of lived experience then there's no point. A political outlook that rejects the murky complexity of life in favor of ideological purity is useless, no matter how righteous it may be. Photography in this sense serves as the vehicle of sight, of something that shows without the ability to embellish on the material fact. A historic moment of a sword being stolen from a politician as an act of resistance to colonization is presented just as profoundly and banally as a child being fingerprinted. Each is simply a fact, a moment in the past, and as such inaccessible to us in the present. They are monuments to events and phenomena that may happen similarly in different forms but are themselves expired, like the ritual sculpture that once contained profundities and now persists as a garden attraction. Our seeing of these monuments, however, exists in the present and our experience of them is tangible if we use our eyes to see them. Jef Geys' framed plants assume organic forms that echo the figures in the Marquis De Sade's baroque sexual poses, something the viewer can only appreciate if they first notice it. To see is to apprehend a fact, to know rather than think what one is expected to think, and it is this apprehension of firsthand experience that denotes the essence of the politically radical, and the artistic in art.