

## TALES FROM THE CITY: New York

### Open Season

by Jonathan T.D.Neil

When writing this roundup of the beginning of the autumn season here in New York, an obvious first move was to flip back through my less than comprehensive notes on the various shows and performances I'd seen: Coco Fusco at P.S.1 ('boring, but earnest'); debut of the Art-212 Fair ('good crowd, crap wine'); SVA Alumni Auction ('\$45,000 for that Elizabeth Peyton? - for any Peyton? - and who sniped the Jutta Koether I bid on!?!'); Rivane Neuenschwander at Tanya Bonakdar ('excellent'); Céleste Boursier-Mougenot at Paula Cooper ('smart'); Nancy Burson at Clamp Art ('Jesus'); Barnaby Furnas at Boesky ('more Jesus'); the Creativetime and Deitch Projects Art Parade ('great, after three bloody marys')...at this point, understandably, my notes become illegible.

Then I sat down with my laptop and, in a spell of loathing amnesia, wrote an utterly pathetic attempt at dirt-dry comedy about the artworld and 'insiderness'. The gist of the thing was that the scene in New York is like a school lunchroom populated by just-pubescent teens, a landscape of hormonally-induced hyperawareness about status and popularity keyed only to 'sitting' in the right place with the right people, and getting there without dropping your tray.

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I thought this was funny, which undoubtedly meant that from someone else's perspective it would read like having a root canal. Of course that alone would not merit abandoning the endeavor, but it was dishonest, and that meant not only that it would not be funny, but it would be a fiction, and so a sorry bid to sound like the thing I was trying to deride.

The fact is, my experience of the artworld in September and early October in New York - if that is indeed what I experienced, and I'm sure there are those who would say I dropped my tray

- did not feel like a school lunchroom rife with anxiety about being 'in'. It felt more like tagging along to a friend's family reunion, a place you could be sure to know nearly no one, but an atmosphere that would be inviting nonetheless, especially given some unseasonably warm weather.

Such was the case one evening in late October when I caught a somewhat off-the-map opening in midtown Manhattan, just past one of the entrances to the Lincoln Tunnel and behind the snarl of lanes that plug into the Port Authority Bus Terminal (these are midtown's unfortunate umbilical cords). This is where Hunter College has its opportunistically titled Times Square Gallery, an impressive maze of roomy exhibition spaces on the first floor of a nondescript 1970s bunker. This evening, the so described 'non-empirical maps' on view - the show was *Personal Geographies*, curated by Joanna Lindenbaum - were strangely fulfilling, mostly because, as I thought about it, there really is no 'inside' to a map, be it personal or empirical.

Maps are inclusive by nature, way-finding devices for those who go touring. Some of the more endearing work, such as Ward Shelley's digestive genealogy of Mike Ballou's 'Four Walls' phenomenon, take definitively insider knowledge out for a stroll. Others, like Danielle Tegeder's crystalline installation, were simply fresh and unselfconscious. The whole exhibition, opening night attendees included, seemed to be flying under a flag of genuine enjoyment. But then again, maybe it was the weather.

Ultimately, of course, the 'insider' shtick is a marketing tool. And yes, art sleeps with commerce. But, as *Personal Geographies* seemed to suggest, it is also an affair with and of the intellect, and a promiscuous one at that. If this makes you a slut in the lunchroom, then I guess I'm proud to be one.