

Notes on Set to Manual

Girls' Club's third exhibition is a look at contemporary art in diverse media, by mostly women and some men, works by artists from Girls' Club collection and beyond, each object characterized by intensive hand manufacture.

The pace of contemporary life has eroded our collective attention spans, our ability to focus, and our enjoyment in investing sustained effort in a personal project. Art's agenda is to slow us down, get us to pay attention. Now more than ever many artists are adamantly rebelling against the generic, against slick product, against works that derive their meaning solely from art world insider contexts and theoretical supports.

The thirty-three artists featured in Set to Manual throw themselves, like lovers, into an intimate, all-consuming relationship with their unique processes. Each small mark or gesture made at a precise moment in the course of the work - like a seduction - directly affects the final outcome. They have opted to bypass automatic, take the wheel, and re-assert their artistic prerogatives. They are fully set to manual.

As if he had read our minds, arts writer Jerry Saltz declared in New York magazine as we were installing this exhibition that an enthusiasm for the handmade is on the rise. He writes "There might not be a new movement per se, but there are radically adjusted mind-sets. Fear of form, color and physicality are diminishing. Previously forbidden methodologies are reemerging: pours, patterns, laminations, complex (even mystical) counting systems, obsessive mark-making and surface manipulation, suggestions of still life, digital motifs, even *trompe l'oeil*. Artists are--hallelujah!--finally tiring of recycling Warhol and Richter and are instead investigating the handmade, and how irony and sincerity can coexist."

The works in Set to Manual swing back and forth between quiet intensity and vivid hedonism. Subtle surface inflections - the mesmeric marks of Tara Donovan, Vija Celmins, and Carol Prusa - steadily weave their subdued magic, while full-tilt saturation of color and texture - Jessica Stockholder, Gean Moreno, Pepe Mar, and Jen Stark - yield hyper-activated icons.

Painting has a long history as an arena for the working out of artistic obsessions. In Set to Manual, Beatriz Monteavaro, Jeni Spota, and Arlene Berrie literally build their imagery from the paint matter, layering substances, glazes, drips and daubs with arresting physicality.

Sometimes the handmade veers extremely close to the virtual. Elaine Reichek's regimented stitchery is the perfect analogue for the digital, pixilated grid. In the case of Amparo Sard and Rosemarie Chiarlone,

precisely spaced pin-prick marks stand in for the 1s and 0s of the digital landscape. Artist/architect Felice Grodin "migrates" her flat drawings which allude to three-dimensional space into the sphere of virtual or gaming reality on the Girls' Club web projects page.

The Set to Manual video program suggests only a few ways that moving images are constructed. Digesting the frame by frame stop motion techniques, hand-altered found footage, and meticulous set construction - and picturing how it's made - is a huge part of the pleasure.

If all artists are technicians manipulating materials (we'll leave the craft v. fine art argument to those who like their food separated on their plates), please evaluate for yourself the labors of the book makers, doll makers, film scratchers, paper prickers, hand-printers, serial doodlers, type engravers, gem gluers, silver flatteners, paper pasters, epoxy sculptors, cross-stitchers, paint pushers, jar collectors, basket weavers, and clay builders on view here.

Girls' Club gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Dennis and Debra Scholl and the galleries and individual artists who have loaned works to this exhibition.

- Michelle Weinberg

Luis Alonzo-Barkigia
Arlene Berrie
Vija Celmins
Rosemarie Chiarlone
Clifton Childree & Nikki Rollason
Tara Donovan
Peter Fischli & David Weiss
Ellen Gallagher
Michael Genovese
Felice Grodin
Arturo Herrera
Yui Kugimiya
Pepe Mar
Annette Messenger
Beatriz Monteavaro
Gean Moreno
Cornelia Parker

Kerry Phillips
Carol Prusa
Elaine Reichek
Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez
Rosanna Saccoccio
Amparo Sard
Michelle Segre
Kiki Smith
Nancy Spero
Jeni Spota
Jen Stark
Sara Stites
Jessica Stockholder
Carolyn Swiszc
Carolina Vasquez
Paula Wilson