

ARTFORUM

Karl Haendel: Harris Lieberman

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Private thoughts and public images are rendered starkly in black and white in Karl Haendel's first New York solo appearance. Three photographs and forty-six labor-intensive, mostly large-scale drawings, depicting everything from Kenneth Noland-esque concentric circles to headlines clipped from the New York Times to iconic photojournalistic images, were arrayed around the gallery walls in a way that verged at times on the ludic (as with one work consisting of the repeated phrase BUSH, PLEASE BUY RUBBERS) and at times on the melancholy (as with elegiac renderings of moments from Haendel's '70s childhood) but that, due to the artist's pixel-perfect style, felt wryly restrained. Indeed, the works evinced a staggering fidelity to their source images, which the artist, with the help of assistants, often uses projections to produce.

The drawings' barely inflected photorealism brings a pencil-wielding Richard Prince to mind, but Haendel's take on appropriation is not, of course, wholly in the spirit of the '70s. The regenerative nature of his practice too often appears as little more than elaborate mimicry—a visual artist's version of sampling—as opposed to the kind of complex and seditious endeavor the Pictures generation participated in. Has appropriation become so dominant a tactic that the term and the act itself are now meaningless? Haendel's work, while easy on the eye, offers few clues.

That said, the artist's sources here punch all the right intellectual buttons. The aforementioned headlines from the Times and a full rendition of a Harper's "Index" speak to the sway and evident authority of text in our cultural lives. On the other hand, 1980 DNC, 2007, an image from the 1980 Democratic National Convention showing three delegates, respectively wearing a Carter, a Mondale, and a Nixon mask, and Untitled (Highjack), 2007, which renders the climax of the Hezbollah takeover of TWA flight 847 in 1985, are reminders of how our political milieu, our relationship to affairs of state, have come to be dominated and dictated by visual images.

If a quintessential New Yorker cartoon rendered as an inverted version of the original (New Yorker cartoon drawing #29, 2007) doesn't make it any funnier, and renderings of laundry detergent boxes (Soapbox #1, Soapbox #2 [both 2007]) look like an art-school exercise, crisply drawn punctuation marks come across less as typographic than as exploratory. Prince once described the collecting of his appropriated images as "beachcombing," and Haendel's hodgepodge of material certainly fits this description. And while, like his forebears, he toys with the idea of authorship and the power of the idea over the experience, his work doesn't have quite the undermining effect of an earlier generation's. It isn't a commentary on commodification, but rather something more appropriate to a decade dominated by punditry. Maybe the work could be more aptly labeled "appropriated editorializing."

It's in his more personal work that Haendel comes across as most sincere about his politics and his craft. Studio Still Life #3, 2007, is rescued from being a banal depiction of studio detritus by the presence of two bullets on what one assumes is the artist's desk. The 2007 text piece Questions for My father #2

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features a series of interrogatories querying the dark (and less dark) aspects of the artist's relationship with his dad: **HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF GOING TO VIETNAM?; DO YOU EVER READ THE LETTERS I SEND YOU?; HAVE YOU EVER EATEN FOIE GRAS?** And where he lets his hand really show, as in *Abstract (two gradients)* and *Abstract (Diagonal Slivers)* (both 2007), the result is a beautiful evocation of space that recalls the architectural photography of H el ene Binet. Finally, selfappropriations like *Ripped Scribble #4, 2007*, a depiction of his own casual scrawl that is dramatically torn and stapled back together, transform themselves into sculpture while manipulating their sources into something altogether superior to the originals.