

art

"It helped me. I don't feel threatened or that people want to steal things from me." In fact, Gladstone has sent collectors

down to Avenue B, more new clients at once than Hearn says she had hoped to cultivate in several years of dealing.

Both Gracie and Hearn feel the incredible publicity generated over the East Village this year is a good omen. "East Village galleries and what they represent are only going to become stronger," claims Hearn. Both also feel that with the press, the collectors, and the curators focused here, young artists couldn't ask for much more.

Yet as Gracie admits, "It is the artists that are the excitement; if they left, that would be it." When asked if she feared her artists moving on to bigger, better spaces, Hearn replied, "I never want the artists I show to feel like I'm holding them back. I want them to show with me because they believe in what's going on here." When Gracie was asked her reaction to losing artists to a Soho dealer, she shot back, "Why, I'd kill her!"

The ties that bind and those that rend are one and the same in the art world: publicity, location, ambience, sales. In the East Village the action's hot now, but the experience and the major contacts still reside elsewhere. Judging which will shift first—the artists or the experience—is going to be a critical question next season.

Civilization and the Landscape of Discontent at Nature Morte

Still Life with Transition at International with Monument
June 20–July 22

By Jack Bankowsky

Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo, editors of *Effects* magazine and critics for *Flash Art*, made their East Village curating debut with two ambitious group shows which ran simultaneously this April, and included 28 artists. Each show was supported by an elaborate theoretical statement, apparently drawn from Situationist tracts and Baudrillard's elaboration of the notion of the "simulacra." The texts are not programmatic but rather attempt to locate theoretically the ideological tendencies common to a group of stylistically disparate works—as well as to characterize the East Village scene.

What comes together here is an escalation of what's happening everywhere. It's been suggested that the avant-garde is reducible to Oedipal struggle—young artists carving out a niche for themselves in an art world already overloaded with artists; i.e. the East Village is no different than Soho or 57th St. But in fact the East Village scene is coming to represent the notion of the market (as opposed to the object) as the site of



Ericka Beckman, *Industrial Series I*, 1984

interest (Lyotard: "Sublimity no longer is in art, but in the speculating on art.") Thus, it all appears beholden to Warhol (and his "mindless" complicity with the culture industry) rather than the more oppositional "critical art practice" of the '60s and '70s which posited themselves against the institution.

It seems that the work in these two group shows, or perhaps the curators' take on it, would divest this "critique of the object," in a perverse, almost fetishistic affirmation of the object. Steven Parrino's obsessive objects—violated but pristine, monochrome stretched canvases—are a case in point. Here even the logic of the multiple (the photos he juxtaposes with the canvases become oddly singular in appearance) mock claims of veracity. Reduced to a radical equivalence, the same gestures that make manifest, conceal and reinvest networks of affiliations which characterize the

market. Modernist gestures appear as parody. This program can even sustain Neo-Expressionism at the level of effect.

What I find most interesting about the curators' texts is that they approach this "spectacular" logic, a mediated world of autonomous images from both sides. If the texts are extravagant, to approach them as textual "effects" rather than prescriptions would not be inconsistent with the "spectacular" logic they formulate. The text accompanying the "Still Life" exhibition valorizes the tendency, while the landscape statement acknowledges what they term "a disturbing depiction of the institutional sublime." The idea that this should be disturbing runs counter to the whole project, and seems to call up again the possibility of a "critical practice," against which the work in the show would assume a symptomatic status.

The color photography (by

Ericka Beckman, Alice Albert, Sarah Charlesworth, Richard Prince, and Laurie Simmons) address these problematics the most articulately. These photographers manipulate quite intentionally the mechanisms of fascination and technical effect. To quote one of the curators' sources: "The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely." The frequently rehearsed critique of the veracity of the unique photographic image is played off against the objects' machinelike sensuousness as evinced in a purely rhetorical posturing with regard to the privileged status of the art object. Ericka Beckman's photographic diptych, in its hyper-seductiveness and elaborate artifice, juxtaposes something like a galleon burning at sea and reflected in the water, with a toy photographed to suggest a spacecraft.

Exemplary at the other end of the spectrum of interest was Barry Bridgwood's small canvas with primitivist hieroglyphs. The baroque frame was painted like a canvas (get it?). Also Stephen Lack's expressionistically painted found objects (neat!). In these works, all else of interest is submerged by the level of bald parody.

Of course, shows of this size presume familiarity with the absent oeuvres of the many artists, who are represented mostly by just one piece. In any case, the show raised provocative questions about the kind of cultural production that can premiere within the gallery, and whether escalating marginality is an absolute logic.