



NEW YORK IN BRIEF

Spring 1995

The world seems to be breathing again. The downtown gallery scene has much work now that is original, interesting and varied. Shows by Rona Pondick, Maureen Gallace, Allan McCollum, Claude Simard, James Casebere, Samm Kuncze and Jennifer Bolande were some of the highlights of the spring season. Intensely personal and often emblematic of psychological interiority, this work shares in an expression of subjective urges or thoughts. Infantile desires loom large, unearthing whispers from the subconscious and transforming them into aggressive screams or autistic silences. Foremost amongst the screamers is Rona Pondick seen at Jose Freire Gallery. Like many contemporary artists, she explodes the unseen forces of her subjectivity, making what is uniquely hers into something that is also ours. The work is not just about Pondick as an infant but the infant lives of all of us, old or young, male or female, dark or light. Pondick's exhibition included a doll's bed with "I want" obsessively handwritten all over it, a subtle but unmistakable turd lying delicately on its mattress/pillow and a heap of oddly shaped plastic sculptures with grotesque mouths. It is the gory, prelinguistic facts of life: the bared teeth wanting to bite whatever is closest, the scatological friend with whom the infant is so familiar, the undifferentiated mass of bodily parts that eerily blur into one another with no polite boundaries between thine and mine – in short, the uncouth and voracious world of originary memories.

James Casebere's exhibition of large photographs at the Michael Klein Gallery were utterly astounding in their vaporous beauty. The photographs showed miniature scenes that he had built, places redolent of the serenity of the monastic life we might all like to inhabit. Casebere manages to capture a world we feel we know intimately yet have never experienced, and that schism between what we can imagine and what we see is painfully laid bare.

At Nicole Klagsbrun's, Maureen Gallace's tiny paintings of blurred landscapes and muted houses serve much the same aesthetic function: tranquility in the eye of the hurricane. Small, discreet and poignantly simple, these paintings are beautiful bits of brushed pigment, elegantly translating an ephemeral moment of nature into a permanent object of culture.

The work in Klagsbrun's downstairs gallery formed a nice dialectic with Gallace's images of nature: photographs of buildings by four Canadian artists. Rodney Graham had a pinhole-camera image of ancient Roman ruins; Ian Wallace pictured a construction site in Barcelona; Roy Arden, a truncated tree stump on its way from a fecundated life to the dump; and Jeff Wall, a cibachrome print of decaying coastal docks. In these photographs the real becomes the "irreal" (W.V.O. Quine's usage). Everyone is seduced by the preciousness of the preternatural.

Much of this current work posits the primacy of the subjective experience as a doctrine for universalizing perspectives. These stories aren't just presented as anecdotal family tales but as intimately experienced sources that must somehow or other be extendable to others. In other words, it is not just solipsism; it's art.

Dena Shottenkirk

Top: James Casebere, *Toilets* (1994), cibachrome print at the Michael Klein Gallery / Bottom: Rona Pondick, *I Want* (detail, 1994), installation at Jose Freire Fine Art Inc., photo by Liz Deschenes

