

**CECI N'EST PAS**  
*Art on Paper*  
2007

**Ceci n'est pas . . . (This is not . . . )  
at Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York**

In the days of record auction sales, megagalleries, and escalating production values, what's more important: the environment in which art is made and sold or the artwork itself? "Ceci n'est pas . . ." begged this question by presenting artwork that lampooned the less savory aspects of the booming art business. This could have made for a gloomy summer show, were it not for occasional moments of humor and the title. Referring to Magritte's famous assertion (the representation of a pipe is not a pipe), the title implied that the curators' take on the art world may or may not be an accurate representation of the way things really are.

Although the show targets the art world at large, the most memorable work roasted artists themselves. Alejandro Diaz's titillating signage promised sexy and cheap art (like a sign on the front door that read, "Naked Artist Inside") while a publication detailing luxurious imaginary travel packages for wealthy artists (including a shopping spree specially designed for Barbara Kruger) by Christopher K. Ho and Troy Richards explored aspects of the artist as a panderer or sellout. David Kramer's dejected drawings and diaristic texts tracked the declining self-esteem of a "failed" artist, while a portrait by Guy Richards Smit pictured the artist as a cold strategist standing in a pool of blood. Nina Katchadourian's lighthearted self-portrait in a beret with two caterpillars forming a mustache was a break from the cynicism but still presented the artist as a living cliché of the oddball outsider.

Most of the artwork included was more consequential for exposing hidden truths than for being ambitious in and of itself. Such modesty seems appropriate; aggressive efforts by individuals at pillorying the art world can come across as more bitter than insightful. In favoring backstage machina-

tions, the show missed the opportunity to elaborate on the more specific examples of how the market might be shaping the look of art today. And though, at face value, "Ceci n'est pas . . ." implied that non-neurotic artists, informed collectors, and honorable dealers had become endangered species, I walked away wondering if it was just that they don't make for juicy subject matter.

—*Merrily Kerr*



David Kramer, *Untitled (The Old-Fashioned Way . . . )*, ink and graphite on paper (15 x 12 1/2 in.), 2007. Courtesy Moti Hasson Gallery and Sara Meltzer Gallery