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Art in Review; 'Log Cabin'

By HOLLAND COTTER

Artists Space
38 Greene Street, SoHo
Through Feb. 26

Given the cultural climate, wedding bells won't be playing "Over the Rainbow" any time soon, and men and women won't be coming out of the closet and going into the Army. So what can Log Cabin Republicans, gay supporters of the ruling party, be thinking?

This is the question asked, for the most part obliquely, by the 33 participants in a snappy, discursive group show at Artists Space that serves as a field report on what art with queer identity as a theme is looking like these days.

As surveyed by the curator, Jeffrey Uslip, an associate director of the Project, a Manhattan gallery, it is looking good and heterogeneous. It is ambisexual in Cass Bird's portrait of a young woman in a baseball cap printed with the phrase "I Look Just Like My Daddy." It's interracial in a video of the artists A.A. Bronson and Nayland Blake wearing white face and black face and sharing a passionate kiss. And it's multi-generational in a lineup that includes Jimmie Durham, born in 1940, at one end, and already accomplished 20-somethings like Glen Fogel, Terence Koh and Wardell Milan at the other.

The show is very much about the present, but is grounded in the historical past, concretely so in documentary pieces by Jonathan Horowitz on Anita Bryant and Rock Hudson's death from AIDS, and in a Kelley Walker installation that includes a photograph of a police dog attacking a black man. And while there is a fair amount of exposed flesh on view in photo-based work by Ken Gonzales-Day, Matt Lipps, Dean Sameshima, Scott Treleaven and the team of Slava Mogutin and Brian Kenny, invisibility, enforced or self-imposed, is a pervasive theme.

It is implied in the figures missing from a Matt Keegan photograph, in a painting by Benjamin Kress that doubles as a mask, in subliminal text pieces by Glenn Ligon and Mark Verabioff, and in a superb film by Mr. Fogel in which embracing bodies are all but abstract.

If women aren't exactly invisible here, there are too few. And the ones on hand turn in outstanding work, from Jenny Perlin's filmed animation of handwritten sodomy law texts; to Allison Smith's installation of carved wood Civil War era -- or is that civil rights era? -- rifles supporting a flag made from a quilt; to a video by Christy Gast in which one woman appears to be slowly and tenderly dressing another in layers of clothes. In fact, Ms. Gast has set the film in reverse: the scene she actually taped was one of undressing.

Exposure -- physical, social or psychological -- is a potentially hazardous condition, as everyone knows. Coupledness and community are possible protective solutions. Artists like Mr. Bronson and Paul Pfeiffer (who is represented by Mr. Uslip's gallery) acknowledge them as such in their contributions; K8 Hardy, a member of the lesbian collective LTTR, suggests doubts in hers.

Ultimately, of course, only when protection is built into law does it have a fighting chance of being secure. Then log cabins built as shelters in a wilderness can be exchanged for wide-open homes in a modern world.
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