



Art

## Disco Balls Meet the Iraq War in Williamsburg

by Sarah Schmerler

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No one takes on the existential, impossible-to-answer questions of making art quite as honestly and consistently as Rochelle Feinstein. A longtime professor at Yale who's seen her painting career soar, then dip off the market radar, she knows whereof she speaks. Hopefully, she'll get a leg up with this fine—if off-the-beaten-path—Williamsburg show. It's full of deceptively slapdash paintings (plus a couple of installation pieces) that are so juicily cynical, they're redemptive.

What's more, Feinstein amps up her usual self-referential fare into a tougher arena: the vicissitudes of making art in wartime America. Take the darkly political triptych *The Little Engine*, for instance. In one panel, Feinstein appropriates an image of a bullet-ridden windshield from the Iraq War, rendering it in pretty sky blues and white; in a second, we get a sort-of-gorgeous abstraction composed solely of gold and silver leaf (precious metals are all the better for sales), while a third panel transcribes a quote by South African artist Zwelelu Mthethwa, a statement full of cogent references to social and global issues and how essential they are to 21st-century artists. You sense that Feinstein agrees with Mthethwa, but she also transcribes his name and words with a host of silly misspellings. In an imperfect world, artists make the best of what they've got. If you've got a sense of humor, better use that, too.

A strange visual theme is peppered throughout other work: a mirrored disco ball. Feinstein paints it onto the screens of a cluster of junky vintage TVs, all of them cacophonously playing real-time programs: election returns, game shows. Are real-world events just fodder for artistic narcissism, as implied by those mirror balls? Or maybe, on a more practical note, to any woman artist over 40, today's competitive, youth-besotted art market (thanks, Yale) must look like one long, ridiculous dance marathon—last one left standing, wins.