

LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

555 E. 2- STREET / SOUTH BOSTON, MA 02127

GALLERY HOURS: WEDNESDAY- SATURDAY 11 – 6 PM, TUESDAY BY APPOINTMENT

(617) 482 – 8400 or www.lamontagnegallery.com

ARTFORUM

APRIL 2009 INTERNATIONAL



BOSTON

Andrew Witkin

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Andrew Witkin won the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston's 2008 Foster Prize for a methodically arranged installation of personal effects and simple furniture made from Baltic birch plywood and square, stainless-steel screws. LaMontagne Gallery recently featured that work's companion project, "Others Among Others," in which those elements once again come to life as poetic statements on collecting that convey the artist's melancholic passions. Witkin, who is director of Boston's venerable Barbara Krakow Gallery, demonstrates a knack for organizing space and displaying objects as precious commodities with architectural precision and curatorial care. The artist is an archivist; in his art—and, one imagines, his life—he is obsessed with making tidy collections and itemized lists.

On entering the LaMontagne Gallery space, the viewer was treated to the only work of art that hung on a wall—*Untitled*, 2006—, a flat, vertical piece of unstained Baltic birch plywood on which Witkin has listed everyone he collaborated with, or who motivated him, to create this project. Among the names of friends, family members, and idols are Witkin's mother, Amy Witkin, fellow Boston artist Brian Zink, philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead, baseball star Pedro Martinez, and artist Yves Klein. This commemorative plaque also includes the exhibition's title, opening and closing dates, and the schedule of related lectures and performances—another indication of the fluid boundaries between Witkin's private life and the public display of his art.

The simply constructed desks, chairs, and display tables that populate this show—modeled after the artist's own furnishings—pay formal homage to Richard Artschwager's minimalist furniture surrogates, but

their meaning accrues from their continual evolution and rearrangement; all are dated as ongoing projects. For *Untitled*, 1996—, the artist created an end table for a delicate arrangement of white rocks, a wad of paper, Ping-Pong balls, cork, and alabaster—objects he collected or sculpted, or that were given to him by friends. The sound piece *Untitled*, 1992—, plays an ever-growing compilation of recordings of the song "Stagolee" from an iPod connected to vintage stereo components and a speaker. To date, this work contains 173 versions, recorded between 1924 and 2008, of the boundary-crossing barfly blues song about gambling and killing. Both speaker and song become a vital addition to the adjacent *Untitled*, 1999—, comprising twenty-five used, black vinyl tiles arranged in a grid—serving as both a dance floor and a salute to Carl Andre's metal floor pieces.

Prominent in the installation was *Untitled*, 1994—, a work marshaling 144 size-medium white cotton Hanes T-shirts on white-painted wood hangers with chrome hooks that hang on four wood racks suspended from the ceiling with wire. On each shirt appears, in black sans-serif letters, an aphorism, word, or phrase—either appropriated or original—that appealed to the artist. The bland uniformity of a retail outlet is suggested, but the T-shirts' slogans, such as LITTLE BITS OF BITTERNESS ABOUT THE ENDING, are like diary entries slipped inside the antiseptic environs of the Gap. These "body absent" unisex T-shirts are there to be handled, browsed, leafed through by the audience like pages in a book, as the artist quietly reaches out for participants in this enigmatic, subtle, and richly satisfying work.

—Francine Koslow Miller