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Karen Archey's Criticism and Commentary on Art 2.0



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At Klaus von Nichtssagend, Joy Curtis' Stalactites Freshen Lower East Side Offerings



Installation view, Joy Curtis "Empty is Run About Freely" courtesy Klaus von Nichtssagend

Ambling about the Lower East Side galleries last week, I came to realize the neighborhood has an insidious enemy: polite little "funky" abstractions. It may be that the last vestiges of criticality representing Orchard have finally washed away, or that I got stuck in [Gianna Commito's quaint exhibition of abstractions](#) at Rachel Uffner, but for some time the Lower East Side has started to feel *different*. Galleries regularly pop up—[some with logos made out of the goofy-if-despicable Comic Sans](#)—and fade away, though both the newcomers and old have recently failed in carrying on the neighborhood's reputation as a less overtly market oriented locus rife with emerging talent and risk taking programming. Could this burgeoning conservatism be residual from the recent recession; a genteel mask to wear when bringing a gallery back from the brink of financial ruin?

Skipping east of Orchard I found Klaus von Nichtssagend's impressive new Ludlow Street space, now in its second exhibition. Petite but expertly designed, upon walking in the gallery a viewer will be blasted with the distinct smell of new construction. For those also a product of suburban development living this is a nostalgic odor, one increasingly rare since the recent economic downturn's snuffing of real estate growth. Approaching the gallery's long hall finds *Empty is Run About Freely*, an exhibition of Joy Curtis' monochromatic arrangements of paper and hydrocol. Some sculptures lay on the floor recalling mini geodesic domes or marble slabs, others perch upon thin metal pedestals or hang from ceiling cables as stalactites. Curtis' more sleek, elegant moments bring to mind Trisha Donnelly's recent marble works or Tatiana Trouvé's organic yet banal minimalist sculptures.



Installation view, Joy Curtis "Empty is Run About Freely" courtesy Klaus von Nichtssagend

The mobiles appear at once sinister yet familiar, sloppy yet sleek. (The sister of one of the directors is rumored to have bumped into one at the opening which showered her with a bit of salt an hydrocol dust.) The stalactites are actually rough casts of the moulding decorating door frames. The casts, taken from a financial district building's elevator among other motifs, document not significant historical relics as one may expect, but rather cast cheap pastiche ornamentations *appearing* historical. Covered in salt, the resulting somber works bring to mind the slippery act of accessing the recent past, its affinity for fiction and resistance to fact.

Empty is Run About Freely is enjoyably difficult to pin down: working through multivalent aesthetics such as minimalism and pastiche architecture, Curtis gives us more dynamic, less couch-ready fodder than many of the neighboring gallery's offerings. After six years in Brooklyn, Klaus von Nichtssagend—the gallery name itself a farce poking fun at the aristocratic branding of many blue-chip contemporary galleries—is clearly doing something right, and a fresh addition to the legendary Lower East Side neighborhood.