

Gayil Nalls presents a truly heartfelt and passionate plea for the future in her show which includes a roundtable of interrelated sculpture, video and printed images (Philippe Staib, January 30 - March 14).

The use of lighting is key to Nalls' work which presents things she has witnessed and recognized as forces determining recent history which she feels reflects "Humanity's coming of age." The gallery is dimly lit, with spotlights on the sculpture, evoking how museums often dramatize and subconsciously disinherit historic, cultural displays by mimicking theatrical devices that serve to create distinctions and dramas that do not actually exist-- the visual equivalent of doublespeak.

The exhibition is entitled "Permutatude," which she defines as "the necessary transformation of individuals' attitudes on a global scale allowing a rapid social reordering to take place." The show finds a mascot in Titanium, an element first discovered in 1790 and since has been primarily used in aviation, astronautics and the military due to its strength, which rivals steel, and its lightness and durability. It was Titanium that created the vehicles that have enabled us the technology to explore realms that have radically changed our world view: the image of earth taken from the moon, an image which has resulted in a heightened awareness of our vulnerability and interconnectedness, was possible due to the use of Titanium in developing spacecraft.

Each work in the show deals with a different specific global issue, and by forming a visually compelling and consistent exhibition, Nalls reflects the interrelatedness of the issues referenced as well. The show's namesake is made of a pallet holding newspapers dating from just before the Gulf War to the tickertape Homecoming parade. Shrinkwrapped onto a wooden pallet, this mute pile is held aloft by means of a counterweight of a strangely organic hooked cranial form made from bronze. Four slabs, similar to ancient steles, are presented standing upright, each one bearing a letter, which together read HOME. A tome of 500 or more pages records Nalls' thoughts and sources throughout the years ensuing the war. Personal images, images culled from newspapers and her own documentation of the falling of the Berlin Wall are paired in prints that line the walls. The videotape that plays on a grid of twelve screens is perhaps the vehicle which ties the rest of the work together. Its image clips and editorial pairing is both informative and resonant. Celebratory images of New Year's Eve at the Berlin Wall cut to antagonistic confrontations between peace activists and those who supported the war in the Gulf.

Nalls seems to be illustrating that there are more than physical boundaries that need to be broken down and absorbed. Nationalism and borders, walls and territory markers all, are extensions of the false sense of individuation, security, power and self-sufficiency that we cling to so tightly. The work seems static compared to her dynamic vision and imploring research, and one wonders if art really is the right medium for this expression. Nalls is an erudite and passionate visionary, unusual in her ability to be both cautionary and encouraging, patient and effective. It seems that her ability to connect things and present them could find a more compelling medium that could expand her call for tolerance and courage beyond the very borders of visual art.

-- Gretchen Faust  
(for ARTS Magazine,  
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