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“Looking Back’: ‘The Eighth White Columns Annual’”

by Roberta Smith

As usual, the White Columns Annual presents a view of the past year in the New York art world that is idiosyncratic, ultrahip and useful. This year’s version, organized by the independent curator Pati Hertling, is also excellent, and installed with care, some wit, and no crowding, albeit with walls of deep pink and gray that assertively deny the traditional white cube.

Ms. Hertling’s summary of 2013 focuses on an art world where the margins meet the underground, artists are mostly young or recently rediscovered and the art object, when present, tends not to have much meat on its bones. One of the show’s two paintings playfully depicts a muted, twisted, partly buried rainbow on a piece of found wood; it is by Alicia McCarthy, who also contributes a matchbox full of color, in the form of the broken tips of colored pencils, that, on a chest-high pedestal, forms a world unto itself. The other painting is a small terse geometric motif in black-on-black baked enamel on steel by Ulrike Müller. The sculptures here — by Amy Yao, Scott Ewalt, Stefan Tcherepnin, Lucy Dodd and Lonnie Holley — all make impressive use of existing objects or materials.

Among the young is the talented Carissa Rodriguez, represented by the impertinent “It’s Symptomatic/What Would Edith Say,” a large autographed photograph of a tongue. The rediscoveries include the 1970s feminist artist Mary Beth Edelson and Zilia Sánchez, a subversive Cuban-born quasi-Minimalist nearing 90, who was given her first survey by Artists Space, and whose



Installation views of the Eighth White Columns Annual, with pieces by Stefan Tcherepnin and Carissa Rodriguez. Credit White Columns

delicate ink drawings from the 1960s rival Lee Bontecou's.

Several works look better here than the first time around, as attested by Ms. Dodd's two sculptures, including a rustically retrofitted modernist chair, recently seen under jumbled circumstances at David Lewis's gallery. You can sit on it while enjoying — which means wearing — “Piper's Helmet,” a wonder of a sound piece by Sergei Tcherepnin, brother of Stefan. And I highly recommend James Richards's elegiac 10-minute video “Rose Bud,” a lyrical yet thought-provoking meditation on homoeroticism and homophobia. Once again the annual is a chance to get out of the art world's blue-chip state, revisit shows you saw and glimpse others you missed. It seems germane to its strength that women outnumber men almost two to one.

White Columns
320 West 13th Street (enter on Horatio Street),
West Village

Through Feb. 22