

BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Thomas Hirschhorn
'Cavemanman'

Barbara Gladstone Gallery
515 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 21

Thomas Hirschhorn is the 45-year-old Swiss-born installationist philosopher whose endearingly thorny makeshift kiosks, pavilions, shrines, libraries and other fly-by-night, jury-rigged constructions of scrap wood, cardboard and duct-tape on the streets of Paris and elsewhere have made him one of the most intriguing artists of the moment. Think of him as Joseph Beuys with a sense of humor and without the egomania. At Documenta in Kassel, Germany, this summer, with help from people in the neighborhood, he built several shacks at a housing complex occupied mostly by Turkish immigrants. One shack was a cafe, another a library, another a television studio, another a museum to the French philosopher Georges Bataille.

For his first show with Barbara Gladstone, he has concocted a tour de force. The gallery is transformed into a cave. Again the materials are wood, cardboard and tape. The work took eight people two weeks to build. There are books everywhere. (A bibliography is available at the front desk.) Photocopies of chapters about globalization and public health are taped to the walls, along with posters of Tupac Shakur and a bare-breasted Pamela Anderson. Mannequins are wrapped in aluminum foil and arrayed as tableaux of cave-dwellers. Paperbacks of tracts by David Hume, Rousseau and Tocqueville are attached to fake sticks of dynamite: booby traps for the mind.

Everywhere are fluorescent lights and garbage containers overflowing with soda and beer cans, as if this were a badly maintained tourist site, a shantytown Lascaux. In fact, video monitors tucked into various nooks show scenes of Lascaux II, the faux Lascaux: videotapes of a fake cave in a fake cave.

Tourist site, bin Laden hideaway, bomb shelter, teenager's dorm room: the allusions slyly bounce



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A detail of Thomas Hirschhorn's "Cavemanman," a cavelike installation of wood, plastic and other materials, at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery.

around. The spirit is paranoid, tongue-in-cheek and excessive, Mr. Hirschhorn leavening the philosophy and moralizing with wit. His vision, frequently expressed, of a nonhierarchical society is here metaphorically represented by the nonhierarchical space of a cave and lightly underscored by graffiti on a wall: "1 Man = 1 Man," painted over and over. But the politics are, psychologically speaking, subterranean.

Gregor Schneider's installation of a house in the German pavilion at the

last Venice Biennale comes to mind for its similarly creative blurring of architecture and sculpture. (Tom Sachs's new installation at the Bohlen Foundation is another current example of over-the-top construction.) But Mr. Hirschhorn's spirit is lighter and more open-armed. At a time when so much new art is so meticulously packaged and commercial, his cheerful messiness is a political statement in itself.

MICHAEL KIMMELMAN