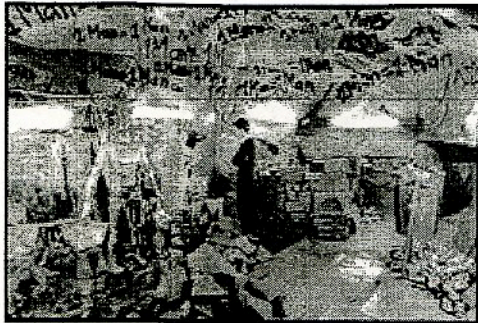


## BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

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### More Is More

by Kim Levin  
November 27 - December 3, 2002



No need to allude to Lascaux or Tora Bora: a detail of Hirschhorn's *Cavemanman* installation at Barbara Gladstone  
(photo: Robin Holland)

**Thomas Hirschhorn**  
Barbara Gladstone Gallery  
515 West 24th Street  
Through December 21

**Tom Sachs**  
Bchen Foundation  
415 West 13th Street  
Through February 14

**T**he happily marginalized art of Thomas Hirschhorn, who has been a major presence in Europe for nearly a decade, has pretty much evaded New York until now. His slapdash kiosks, scrappy pavilions, and seemingly improvised shrines to failed modernists and social theorists (Popova, Léger, Deleuze) deploy political smarts as well as childlike pleasure and anti-aesthetic charm. On the biennial circuit, his excessive accumulations of simple stuff tend to cause a stir. Some of us love them. Others loathe them. In Lyons in 2000, his mini-golf terrain of charred towns, refugee tents, and peacekeeper vehicles had signposts pointing the way to Srebrenica and Kosovo. In Kassel last summer, his makeshift monument to Bataille in the courtyard of an immigrant housing development did double duty

as a community center. But except for a terrifically trashy piece crammed into the shop window of the former Soho Gugg a few years ago, the Swiss-born, Paris-based artist—who insists he doesn't make political art—has remained largely unknown here.

*Cavemanman* rectifies that. There's a primal satisfaction in walking into a haughty, high-stakes, white-cube Chelsea gallery to find that you've entered a messy, makeshift cave. The cavernous labyrinth of lumpy tunnels, nooks and crannies, rocky pathways, and culs-de-sac, all clumsily made of cardboard, aluminum foil, and miles of shiny mud-brown wrapping tape, is preposterous, slapdash, sort of womb-like, and vaguely intestinal. Its bumpy ground is littered with very fake rocks. Cans of Sprite and Coca-Cola litter the floor and overflow from gold foil garbage cans. Xeroxed pages from books about justice and democracy are taped to the walls. And in addition to us transient viewers, stumbling along its paths disoriented and bemused, the five-room cave is inhabited by clusters of aluminum foil figures and foil-wrapped shopwindow mannequins, who are linked by foil cords to make-believe explosives or books. Hostages or terrorists, throwbacks to the past or refugees from the future, these figures also evoke, quite by chance, the recent episode in a Moscow theater, but *Cavemanman* was in the works long before that site of cultural production was overtaken or stormed. The slogan scrawled repeatedly on the cave's walls, "1 man = 1 man," has to do not with terror but with absolute equality.

Yet Hirschhorn's work isn't about the individual but about the social contract and the dissolution of public space. The artist, whose rambling display at the 1995

Johannesburg biennial was titled *Less Is Less, More Is More*, detests the word *installation*. He has a horror of the word *context*. He strives to be stupid. "I don't care about quality, I care about the energy which comes out of an artwork," he remarked to Francesco Bonami in an interview a couple of years ago.

Utterly ingenuous and infinitely sly, Hirschhorn has a finely honed sense of site-specificity as resistance and a contradictory amalgam of the sweetly simpleminded and the theoretically abstruse that can lull you into thinking that it's all a cheap trick, a theatricalized act of regression. But then you spot John Rawls's *Theory*, wired to four playful sticks of foil dynamite, or the mechanically reproduced pages of Tocqueville's historic tome taped to a lumpy wall. Or it dawns on you why a group of world clocks, the kind usually found in commercial banks, is inset into a tape-slathered wall. Telling us the time—not in London, Paris, and Tokyo but in Calcutta, Mombasa, and Kandahar—they implicate the global economy in local wretchedness.

—By the time you get to the cavernous innermost sanctum, heaped with huge books—about justice, democracy, culture, and equality, as if for a bonfire, you get the message. With its crude materialization and make-believe volumes on philosophy and social theory, *Cavemanman* has no need to allude to Lascaux or Tora Bora. Those referents, along with faint echoes of Warhol and Beuys, are already hot-wired into our synapses. Purposely imperfect and far from ideal, Hirschhorn's cave doesn't even have to make points about Plato's. Stretching from the clichéd dawn of civilization to the impoverished, entangled, hysterical, panicky start of our current century, it embodies excesses of power and powerlessness, abundance and scarcity, hinting that humanity's caveman past may be the inverse image of a not-so-distant inhuman future. And it does all this utterly without irony, without cynicism, without regret or nostalgia for the lost modern world, and without resorting to didactic tactics. It simply assumes a new structural model that—like multinational corporations, Internet Explorer, and Al Qaeda—is thoroughly interlinked, and runs with it. In a strange way, Hirschhorn's work is almost utopian. His subject is no less than the nature of civilization itself.

If Hirschhorn lures us into a post-historical philosopher's cave that reflects on the theory, practice, and devolution of democracy, Tom Sachs, who uses packaging materials too (white foam-core board, a hot-glue gun, brand-name logos), also remakes the world out of simple stuff in "Nutsy's," a huge commissioned installation at the new quarters of the Bohemian Foundation. Better known as a maker of loaded objects, Sachs raises similar questions of haves and have-nots, of dashed hopes and profligate waste, as he expands from crude rebel mock-ups of weaponry and luxury objects to "the world in 1:25 scale." At first sight, "Nutsy's" has the cold fluorescent air of a demented showroom. But while the shipping-container modules and metal grille floor designed by LO/TEK are part of the space, the full-scale, handmade ghosts of classic Mies van der Rohe furniture from the 1929 Barcelona Pavilion are part of the show.

The world according to Sachs pairs a scale model of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, the most utopian early modern housing block, and a blaring, 10,000-watt boombox of similar size and shape; a scale model of Villa Savoye and a not dissimilar McDonald's restaurant. It contrasts a neat sculpture park (Brancusi, Calder, Di Suvero) with a crumbling ghetto street. And a full-scale "Nutsy's McDonald's," equipped to serve burgers and fries, meets its match in a podium/bar/DJ station stocked with liquor and emblazoned with the seal of the president of the United States. Banks of real-time videos surveil viewers and space.

The whole thing is linked and encircled by a network of spiraling and looping asphalt roads that continues on the floor below. It may be an awkward way to turn sculpture into installation, but it has a wild logic that's funny and terrific. The only cause for complaint is that the remote-control cars are inactive. Only on Tuesday evenings do they come to life, along with the McDonald's fryers, to animate, unify, and turn this inert installation into a giant, greasy game.

*Cavemanman* took Hirschhorn and his assistants two weeks to make. Sachs's installation took two years. And while *Cavemanman* plays dumb, embraces lack of quality, and calls for pure equality, "Nutsy's" asks how Le Corbu's democratic

vision of improving humanity by housing it in style got transformed into an international infestation of fast-food franchises where everyone can eat equally unhealthily. So why is it that Hirschhorn's work, mimicking the new global model of cheap materiality and hyperproductivity, seems less simplistic and more optimistic? Why does Sachs's work, while pondering the global debasement of the dream of equality, sometimes come off as glib, crass, irresponsible, or cynical? It would be going too far to say that's the difference right now, in art and politics, between Europe and America. Maybe it's just proof that life is unfair.

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