

'Overt Operation'

Joseph Helman
601 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 18

A punchy show of artists who combine words and graphic design to politically tendentious ends, "Overt Operation" breaks no new ground, but it does point up how useful Pop Art style continues to be for leftist partisans. David Schild's words painted over stripe compositions — "Terrorist" in pink script on red, white and blue bands, for example — neatly lampoon what you might call the corporatization of consciousness. Joe Amrhein's "Evil Doers," which scrambles and layers the letters in this famous phrase, skewers patriotic babble.

Sayings of Chairman Mao printed on cigarettes exhibited in metal cigarette containers make up a project by Xu Bing that repackages seemingly benign ideology as a toxic commodity. David Opdyke humorously re-envisioned geography in finely made drawings; his "Homeland Defense," for instance, is a map of the United States with all the mountains shifted to the perimeter.

Two artists are more specifically informative. Ivan Navarro's "You Sit, You Die" is a beach chair with structural elements made of glowing fluorescent tubes and its seat printed with the names of all the people who have been executed by electric chair in Florida. Beautifully penciled diagrams by Mark Lombardi, who died in 2000, chart, for example, "Casino Resort Development in the Bahamas c. 1955-89," in which many interesting names appear, including Ferdinand Marcos, Richard M. Nixon, Donald Trump, Merv Griffin and Meyer Lansky.

KEN JOHNSON

'Critical Consumption'

Rotunda Gallery
33 Clinton Street
Brooklyn Heights
Through March 15

Through boom and bust, consumerism moves right along, an economic reality and a global state of mind. And it's the subject of this well-selected group show, organized by Jonathan Allen, which indicates in no uncertain terms that products and ideologies alike are for sale.

On the fashion front, for example, there is a handbag collection by the artist Cheryl Yun, each custom purse made from recent newspaper photographs of international war and violence. And in the housewares department, one can choose among Margarita Cabrera's soft sculpture sweatshop versions of kitchen appliances and politically inflected items for the home — ranging from Bush vs. Gore dish towels to a "John Ashcroft Snow-Globe" — by the design team of Ligorano/Reese.

Advertising is, as always, a ubiquitous, if half-hidden, persuader. Paintings by Miquel Luciano tease racist messages out of vintage packaging labels. Heidi Cody disguises fast-food logos as modernist abstractions. David Opdyke sends inventively twisted campaign slogans — "Support Trent Nader," "Elect Hillary Renquist" — floating out into the sunset in his video "Patriotic Shuffle."

Finally, the collective called Associated Artists for Propaganda Research offers a slice of Hollywood-worthy fiction in the form of a tabletop-size model depicting the crash, from causes unknown, of Air Force One. Like all of the work in the show, this one is for sale: \$2,500. And the beat goes on.

HOLLAND COTTER