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Pagens, Peter, "Wise-guy-isms, Fence Posts and the Number Six," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2016

Zarouhie Abdalian: A Betrayal

[Clifton Benevento](#)

515 Broadway, (212) 431-6325

Through May 14

Ordinarily, Zarouhie Abdalian (b. 1982) creates installations of a somewhat abject nature, polite versions of the more politically aggressive site-specific intrusions of Hans Haacke or Jerri Allyn. In 2014 at the New Orleans African-American Museum of Art (Ms. Abdalian went to college at Tulane), the artist coupled a man's recorded voice reciting the names of tools used by slaves, with a brick path going around the rear of the institution, and some strategically placed mirrors, to build what the Museum termed "a study in moderation" and a "temperate intervention."

In the right context, which is to say someplace bigger, grittier and less cozy than a standard white-cube art gallery, such installations can work poetic wonders. Confined to a contemporary art emporium, however, an artist such as Ms. Abdalian is often forced either to fill up the chamber so much that it feels like granny's attic, or to attenuate the offering so that the viewer gets a pretty good idea of what the artist is usually up to, aesthetically and philosophically, elsewhere. Here, Ms. Abdalian has chosen the latter.

The gallery contains (counterclockwise from the entrance, as museum labels are wont to say) a wall-mounted mortise lock, two small plaster busts of a Classical man's head facing each other, a printed translucent screen mounted on a window, a lava rock on the floor, and four

black steel sculptures that look like poles from a decorative fence. The rest of the gallery is conspicuously bare, which is, one assumes, a bit of the point. How it all mounts up to "A Betrayal" is difficult to say. Although one simply has to take Ms. Abdalian's word for it, her track record makes her fairly trustworthy.



'One into two' (2016) by Zarouhie Abdalian
Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein / Zarouhie Abdalian / Clifton Benevento, New York