

## Matt Keegan in New York

By Sarah Douglas

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NEW YORK—Whipsmart young conceptualist Matt Keegan appears to be exploring a new vein of art making: If the go-go market of the last several years brought us what British critic Ossian Ward dubbed “bling conceptualism” (exhibit A being Terence Koh’s gold-plated turds), Keegan is making what we might call “domestic conceptualism.” (Put differently, if there can be said to be artists of the sublime — Barnett Newman, et al — Keegan may be our first artist of the subprime.) His current show at D’Amelio Terras in New York, titled “New Windows” and running through April 25, is affectingly zeitgeisty, but it takes some time, some extended looking, and a little puzzling out to fully experience it.

Nearly blocking your passage into the small room that houses his work is a tall slab of drywall on which are carefully incised phrases like “Who are they and when are they coming?” which were garnered from the movie *Field of Dreams*. Past this slab are six small photocollages that take as their starting point a banal event in Keegan’s old apartment on New York’s Lower East Side. The super had come to fix a window. Keegan photographed him at work several times, and has taken the images apart and rearranged them, such that the super’s tools — hammer, tubs of sheetrock, broom, gloves, sponge, trowel, hose, garbage can, spirit level — are arrayed around the room in strange ways. So is the super himself, who sometimes seems to be working outside the window, beyond which Keegan has jumbled the view so that the street appears to be in the sky. Across from these collages, Keegan has cut out an aperture in the gallery wall — revealing three layers of sheetrock — into which he has placed a lush color photograph of a sunbeam piercing thick foliage. Kittycorner to it is a painting — or rather what appears to be a deconstruction of a painting, the canvas seeming to peel away, revealing the frame — by his friend, artist Richard Aldrich, whose recent show at nearby Bortolami gallery closed last week. The painting echoes the shape of the window in the collages. Across the room from Aldrich’s painting, leaning against a wall, is a life-size photograph of Keegan’s cat Neptune affixed to a thin sheet of aluminum, so that the cat appears to sit in the gallery. And on the reverse side of the *Field of Dreams* sheetrock is a large photograph of Keegan’s old apartment, sans construction work — a serene view of a gray couch and coffee table accented by the sunlight that streams through the windows.

Keegan is playing here with space both real (the cutout gallery wall) and remembered (the reference to Aldrich’s show, the scenes of the apartment in disarray). His work may at first glance seem heady and opaque, but one key to his concerns comes in an edition of 500 booklets he produced for the exhibition. Inside are images of buildings in varying degrees of completion, some veiled in scaffolding, often viewed from skewed angles or shown crisscrossed by shadows from other structures, such that they resolve into abstract studies of space. Bookending those photos

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are two reproduced articles, one from the New York Times that tells the story of an Atlanta builder whose re-creation of the White House has been threatened by foreclosure, the other a New Yorker “Talk of the Town” piece that asks what the city will look like in the wake of the subprime collapse, with its shuttered storefronts and “stillborn” construction sites. “What will become of the pits?” the article asks. “Can we turn them into half-wild swimming holes, like the granite quarries of New England? Ring them with barbed wire and convert them into debtors’ prisons or interment camps for the culprits who structured synthetic C.D.O.s?” In his collages, Keegan is subtly exploring themes of entropy and renewal — taking his super’s job one step further by tearing up the very fabric of his living room, and in so doing, showing how flimsy (just bricks and layers of sheetrock) a home really is. If it’s possible, he’s made a kind of subprime poetry.

Another hint lies in the artists who interest him. A prodigious curator — he did the programming for Andrew Kreps Gallery for several months in 2005 — and a sharp writer, two years ago Keegan penned an article for *Modern Painters* magazine about artists whose works “insist on memory in a space designed for forgetting, treat time in ways that extend beyond a 30-day exhibition cycle, and require the venue of viewing... to be activated over and over.” Something similar could be said of Keegan’s own exhibition, where his collages remix time and space, as the gallery itself is subtly transmogrified into a domestic setting.

Keegan is now teaching at the College of the Arts in California, but he was back in town long enough to install his work, attend his opening, and see some exhibitions.