

Special Focus: REVIEWS MARATHON, NEW YORK

Recently ArtReview has been staring at its growing pile of press releases and wondering: 'Is it possible to see (almost) everything?' So this month it forced four NYC reviewers to each review 26 shows in the space of a week in order to see if they would be reduced to gibbering wrecks or provide us with a coherent account of the artworld in all its varied glory. Shooting from the hip (because they were too tired to do anything else), and staring face-to-face with the good, the bad and the ugly, our writers tell you what it's like to be reviews-marathon-men. (PS: The answer's probably no.)

And maybe this: why is it that we have such a difficult time accepting contemporary political art as either aesthetically significant or historically important, at least in the US? One would think that we should have found our George Grosz by now, our John Heartfield. We are in the middle of a war, after all, and we have been subject to a political administration that, no matter your politics, has guaranteed that 'incompetence' will be forever be known as America's number one export. So where is the art to match? What is our response? (And no, this is not a call for incompetent art.)

(22) KAREN FINLEY's show *Nation Building*, at Alexander Gray Associates, seems to suggest that part of the problem may be generational. It's not that younger artists engage politics in their work, it's that when they do - even when they do it well - we dismiss it as the product of youth's rebelliousness, of a naive idealism, which could do with a few more years slugging it out in the 'real world'. Finley's suite of drawings make contemporary politics utterly personal: drawn, literally, from Finley's dreams, each piece demonstrates just how deeply saturated the artist's psychic life has become with Condi Rice and the Bushes, and with the way that these and other political icons find themselves folded in with the rather vacuous popular culture that occupies at least as much of the news cycle as politics: one drawing imagines 'Dubya's' face tattooed on Anna Nicole Smith's breasts (after which the *Times* runs a story calling George a 'boob'); another imagines that, on the matter of cloning, the President makes an exception for James Brown. Coming as this does from Finley, who was in her teens during the height of the Vietnam War, it's easier to accept as authentic. From someone 20 years younger, such direct engagement would come off as self-indulgent.

And finally this: hands down, the best show one could see was not in Chelsea, but at the Drawing Center in SoHo. (23) ALAN SARET: *Gang Drawing* defies discourse in a wholly different way: it simply demands that one see it, and that's all I could think to say.