

"LOWER EAST SIDE AS PETRI DISH"  
BY ROBERTA SMITH  
REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

ing French independent filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, coinciding with their retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

Here are several standout shows. (Map, Page 32)

**PIEROGI** Less than three weeks ago, Pierogi, a Williamsburg stalwart, made a solid landing on Suffolk Street with "The Felicific Calculus," the Manhattan debut of Ward Shelley, whom it has shown since 2001. Mr. Shelley is best known for offsetting his dystopian worldview with exuberant amounts of information, true and invented. On this occasion he has kitted out Pierogi's fresh, lovely space as a bookshop or library, hanging his chartlike paintings on paper among 20 fake bookshelves filled with hundreds of fake books that have a realistic ring. The charts sometimes focus on art but mostly track the end of the world by cars, shopping, climate change and so on. One of the most colorful is "Work, Spend, Forget," the history of consumer desire told as

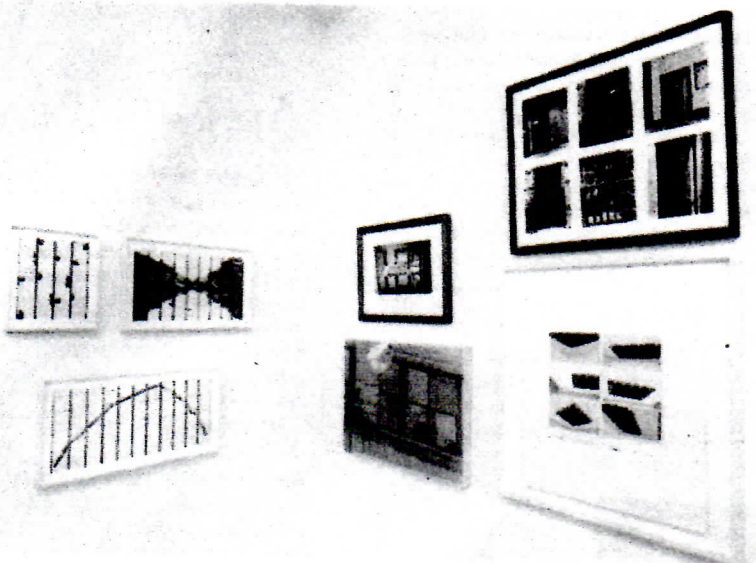
the dissection of a frog. The bookshelves and books together form "The Last Library," a continuing collaboration with the artist Douglas Paulson. The titles, by authors fictional and real, have a certain bite, as in "Master a Fearful Rhetoric" by "Newt Gingrich." All this may invite extended browsing in those whose interests include art, literature, history, politics, humor or science. Note the varieties of fonts Mr. Shelley and Mr. Paulson have digitally devised for the book spines.

● **MITCHELL ALGUS** This veteran of Chelsea and SoHo opened on Delancey and Norfolk in January, continuing his revisionist project, now in its third decade, of bringing overlooked artists and patches of art history to light. The latest effort and one of his best is "Concept, Performance, Documentation, Language," an assembly of over 100 works mostly from the early 1970s. It tracks second-wave Conceptualists as they bent the relatively mandarin ap-

proaches of the first toward real life, encompassing the body (and feminism), the environment and popular culture while putting photographs and texts to new uses. The show resurrects work by artists like James Collins, Roger Welch, Neke Carson and Eunice Golden; shines a light on Story Art, Conceptual Art's second cousin; and includes little-seen early pieces by Betty Tompkins and Jaime Davidovich. This is a signal curatorial achievement.

**BRIDGET DONAHUE** Another strong show is Jessi Reaves's debut at the gallery established on the Bowery last year by Bridget Donahue, formerly a director at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, which also now has a space in the neighborhood. Ms. Reaves makes sculpture that is also furniture, not so much by blurring their shared border as by laying waste to it. Endowed with an aggressive and unsettling wit, her mutant chairs, tables and cabinets take bricolage to a new level, cobbling together found materials, objects large and small, and furniture scraps and innards. A sawdustlike glue is big, as are exposed foam, hand-carved woods, creative upholstery and startling contrasts of materials. Homages abound: Noguchi's classic 1947 coffee table is redone using sliced car doors for the mirroring forms of its base, conjuring Richard Prince. A butterfly chair is rendered in lavender suede and heavy wood, not canvas and tensile metal. I'm not sure how genuinely comfortable some of these pieces are, but they speak in tongues design-wise, turning the language inside out and making a wonderful noise.

**CANADA** This 14-year veteran of these parts added the adjacent storefront to its Broome Street space in January, enabling a double bill of two vociferous solo shows that channel aspects of the art of the 1980s. In "Skin Game" in the main space, the maverick performance artist and erstwhile sculptor Michael Mahalchick riffs on appropriation and popular culture. His cheek-to-jowl hang of moldering collages inflicted on vintage rock posters is often darkly vision-



**GAINING A FOOTHOLD** "Concept, Performance, Documentation, Language," above, a project at Mitchell Algus, is meant to spotlight overlooked artists. Below, "The Felicific Calculus," an installation by Ward Shelley at a Pierogi outpost.