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Quirks and Attitude to Burn

Importance of Being Earnest

— By Holland Cotter

EXCERPT

But enough with all this cogitation, you say. A smart, prickly group show, “In Defense of Ardor,” at Bellwether in Chelsea, designed, say its press materials, to counteract “insipid notions of irony, unremitting cynicism and pessimistic detachment,” could not agree with you more.

Not that its stance is all that daring. For most of the 2000s, art pundits have campaigned to replace kvetchy postmodernism with a New Sincerity. By why an either/or proposition? Can't irony be ardent? Can't ardor be critically self-aware? Can't passion and reason coexist? At Bellwether they often do.

Johanna Billing's “Project for the Revolution,” a looping film of comely young people milling about, is a remake of a scene from [Michelangelo Antonioni's](#) 1970 “Zabriskie Point,” but with the radical politics left out, and, Ms. Billing seems to suggest, sorely missed.

A sculpture by Colby Bird, who has a show with Joshua Fields at CRG in Chelsea, treats both hip-hop culture and Minimalism with tough but palpable love. A graffiti placard by Julieta Aranda doesn't have the punch of Ms. Diamond's do-or-die command at Gagosian, but gives the impression that it feels that it should.

At first glance, Kirsten Stoltmann's still-life assemblage of tumbleweed placed on a faux-Navajo rug seems to give off New Age vibes, except that tumbleweed, painted with automotive chrome, suggests barbed wire. Three pretty collages by Jacob Robichaux are made with kindergarten materials, but the results look slightly deranged.

Finally, a Claymation video by Nathalie Djurberg has a feel-good ambient score that pulls you into the viewing room. But the story itself, about a girl and her pet cat, is a horror show of sado-masochistic affection. This is strong, weird, rapturously subterranean stuff.