



James Hyde:
Clearing, 2009,
acrylic on digital
print on linen,
68 by 86½ inches;
at Southfirst: Art.

four of which were included in this show. Full of tumbling bridges, falling furniture and a great deal of linear pattern, they have the density and intricacy also achieved in the exhibition as a whole. Fitted into the gallery space like pieces in a puzzle, the three big structures created a crystalline but bewildering maze. In a statement written for the exhibition, Armajani cites uncharacteristic sources: Giacometti's *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, and, from Brecht, "Enter the city in the morning with your coat buttoned up / Look for a room, and when your friends knock: / Do not, oh do not, open the door / But / Cover your tracks."

—Nancy Princenthal

JAMES HYDE SOUTHFIRST: ART

The investigation of painting's fundamentals has lately led James Hyde to use photographs as supports. In "Unbuilt," the New York-based, mid-career artist unveiled 22 such works made over the last four years, pictorial mongrels in which the ostensibly evidentiary nature of the photograph is crossbred with the speculative spirit of abstraction. The flat-footed snapshots, digitally printed in a wide range of sizes, show construction sites, foliage, clouds and water. Deployed across them are areas of acrylic paint, or their proxies—painted blocks of wood, bits of paper, chunks of Styrofoam, swaths of silver tape—that do not fully inhabit the space of the photos but infiltrate and deflect it. This is not the fractured and reconstituted picture plane of Cubist-derived collage, but a dreamlike space

containing gently surreal incongruities.

A coat of paint with the nasty texture of an old wall—a squat, blue-and-white L shape—invades a shot of a leafy forest canopy in *Clearing* (68 by 86½ inches, 2009). Like two other, even larger works, it is mounted on linen and stretchers. A grand and confounding image, it grafts the visual vocabulary of reductivist abstraction to a token of the Romantic landscape. In a nod to the historical link between gestural painting and organic form, the artist's touch is looser in *Plot* (21 by 27 inches, 2006), in which he deposits a pool of brushstrokes on a close-up of saw-toothed weeds.

As its title suggests, the ramifications of *Written* (28 by 43 inches, 2008) are in part textual. On the blank slate of an overcast sky, white bands of paint meander like a labyrinth: skywriting's dissipating vapor trails? *Wave* (32 by 43 inches, 2009) is quizzical and magnificent. Inset flush left into a churning photo of a torrent of water is a smaller rectangle of saturated orange paint. It conceals just enough of the picture to render the rest nearly illegible, ironically bringing out its "painterliness." A couple of hot flecks of paint spot the photo's surface. Buzzing between the foamy blue above and the green below, the dizzy, vivid orange is chromatically integrated but, against the blandly smooth inkjet print, alien in its tactility.

Hyde declines any easy resolution of painting and photography, using one like a crowbar to pry open the other. Albeit inadequately, a photo substantiates otherwise ephemeral appearances of the

Zeng Fanzhi: *Portrait*
08-12-6, 2008, oil
on canvas, 59½
by 41½ inches; at
Acquavella.



past. Yet the mark of the hand refutes the clock, tying the image to the present. These hybrids bring digital documentation and haptic immediacy into exquisite equipoise, an intimate standoff of the elegiac and the celebratory. Photos are ghosts, as Hyde contends, but his material interventions call them back from the dead.

—Stephen Maine

ZENG FANZHI ACQUAVELLA

In his first solo show in New York, Chinese painter Zeng Fanzhi (b. 1964) showed over two dozen works dating from 2007 to the present, a period punctuated by the historic sale of his *Mask Series No. 6* (1996) at Christie's Hong Kong in spring 2008. That yellow-ground, nearly 12-foot-wide diptych, a portrait of eight youths in shorts, red bandanas and white masks, garnered \$9.7 million—the top price ever paid for a contemporary Chinese artwork.

The New York show included 18 portraits of male subjects, clad variously in dress clothes, ranging from bust-like facial studies to full-length views, almost all featuring monochromatic backgrounds. Moving away from his early tendency toward caricature, Zeng presents a cast of relatively stoic characters, his signature preoccupation with the mask (nowhere in evidence in this show) having shifted to deadpan facial expressions and poses borrowed from the realm of fashion.

Portrait 08-12-6 (2008)—a sympathetic rendering of a gawky hipster in red blazer, yellow T-shirt, baggy trousers



View of JJ Peet's exhibition "The TV Show," 2009, showing mixed-medium sculptures on pedestals; at On Stellar Rays.

and sneakers—is a profoundly humane character study, even though the subject remains a virtual cipher, impervious to full psychological penetration. The young man's florid, if inscrutable, visage suggests inward reflection. His body, with its oversize hands and head, offers a stark antithesis to his hip attire. Zeng smears oil paint vertically upward from the character's trendy haircut and, in other places, allows paint to drip down the canvas, the boundary-breaking streaks a metaphor for the individual's merely momentary self-constitution. Two self-portraits (both 2008)—one a three-quarter head study, the other a half-length view of the artist at work on a painting—are sterling examples of unmannered analysis and psychological self-reckoning.

The survey also contained several brooding landscapes, most evincing Zeng's recent evolution from images with a single figure standing in densely intertwined thickets toward scenes bearing virtually no evidence of human trespass or habitation. In *Untitled 08-4-9* (2008), depicting a close-up tangle of growth, the brushstrokes waver between signs for nature and purely physical markings on the canvas support. The slathers of oil paint bespeak a state of claustrophobia relieved only by a crepuscular sky that fills the topmost portion of the canvas, decanting the work's fearsome emotions into the void. There is little to be found anywhere today that can match Zeng's deft, impassioned renewal of the tragic sublime in landscape painting.

—Gregory Galligan

JJ PEET ON STELLAR RAYS

A complex hybrid of video and live broadcast coupled with sculpture and painting, JJ Peet's first New York solo exhibition, "The TV Show," was an unsettling mix of rough-hewn underground activism and savvy high-tech wizardry. These distinct elements coalesced to confound and entice with intimations of paranoia and powerlessness in the face of terrorism, economic collapse, and governmental control and deception. Something was happening here, but we weren't quite sure what it was.

The conceptual conceit underlying the show was a struggle between Peet's imaginary forces, "The Luxury Leaders," who represent the powers that be, and the opposing agitators, "The Resistants." Their shadowy "activities" play out in 13 found-object sculptures and videos. The show's 60-second "trailer," displayed on a monitor, set the tone, its montage of fast-cut scenes, close-ups and snappy soundtrack coming off like the opening sequence of a James Bond film. Unlike a Bond plot, Peet's investigation of 21st-century dislocation and disenfranchisement was not easy to follow. Persistence was rewarded, however.

Evoking outsider art, the 13 assemblages (2009), displayed on handmade pedestals or mounted on the walls, have a totemic, surreal quality, enhanced by strange juxtapositions of unusual materials, including horse and dog hair, eyebrow hair, chewing gum, a vulture feather, dried carrots, a rubber mouth guard, orange vest, kneepad, sunglasses, sock, pen,

spoon, houseplant, ice pick and door-knob. *B.S. Trophy* (2009), a spindly tower of lead, copper, white rope, electrical tape and chewing gum, also contains a silver spoon that Peet managed to swipe from the Bear Stearns cafeteria after that company's particular debacle hit the news. Peet seems to repeatedly question the ascribed value of objects and the way they are monetized. Though not apparent to one-time visitors, subtle alterations were made to the sculptures over the course of the show, as in the mysterious overnight removal of a pocket from the orange vest in *The Resistants' Game Piece* (2009). These gestures were intended to demonstrate that meaningful change can be accomplished through a series of small "moves," as the artist calls his various renegade actions.

The predominant component of the exhibition was Peet's weekly "TV Show," broadcast live from a nearby undisclosed location to a television in the gallery each Saturday (reruns played during the week). Averaging 15 minutes each, the shows featured live and prerecorded video related to news events of that week intercut with Peet's own footage, and seemed to track the actions of the Resistants and Luxury Leaders. Repeated viewing revealed subtle associations and narrative threads connecting the show's disparate elements.

In this idiosyncratic and inventive show, Peet expressed a distinctly personal ethos. His minute gestures often appeared slyly funny, but his genuine commitment to instigating change was unmistakable.

—Amanda Church