

issues at stake—inmate advocacy, production techniques, hand labor, and inventiveness winning out over prohibition. The effect was to humanize Angelo without inviting judgment of his criminality.

—Susan Snodgrass

KANSAS CITY

Christopher Leitch at Jan Weiner

Words are animate, electrifying presences in Christopher Leitch's new works on paper (all 2005, 22 by 30 inches). To make them materialize on the page he uses a variety of mediums, some chance processes and an unusual writing procedure. As a result, the simplest terms—who, what, now, here—acquire a sense of urgency in what Leitch refers to as "one-word poems."

The word "here," written upside

paper in water and worked on it wet. In *who, upside down and backwards, eyes closed*, the word "who" is folded into a fractured green and white abstraction that renders the word illegible.

In addition to one-word poems, Leitch enshrines, chops and abuses pairs or series of words and phrases. Like a child who incorrectly calculates the width of the page, he splits words at random in *what do I know upside down*. The fat blue letters on a watery brown ground of *if I remember correctly, upside down* get the same treatment. One must work to link the broken texts as they track across and down the page.

The largest piece, *even in a nation*, presents a passage of text attributed to one L.G. Bierman. Lettered in red, white and blue chalk on a vintage 1867 map of U.S. territories, Bierman's words—"Even in a nation which honors the right to speak, a heart knows what cannot be said"—inject a political charge into this philosophically nuanced exhibition. Seen in Leitch's framework, it's a big yang that balances the show's collected smaller yins.

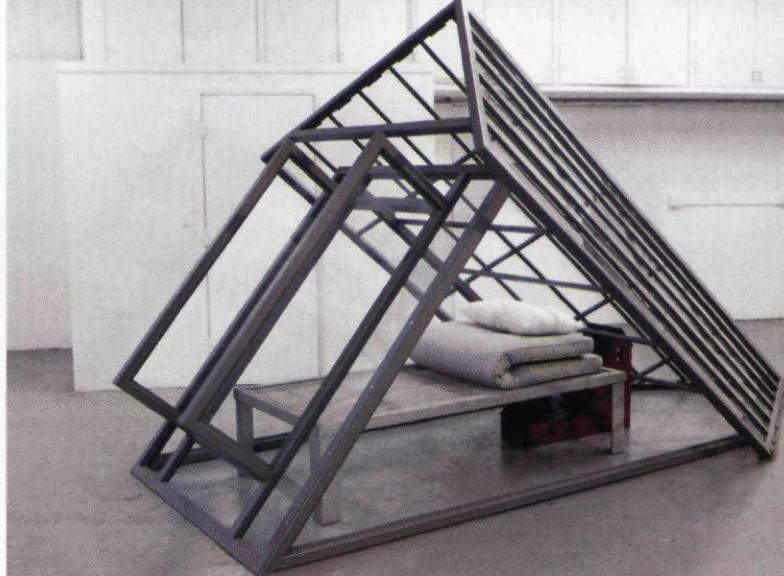
—Alice Thorson

MINNEAPOLIS

Siah Armajani at Weinstein

Siah Armajani is widely known in the community where he lives. A pedestrian bridge he designed spans the roadway next to the Walker Art Center, and there are other important works—a skyway, a garden, a covered walkway—in the Twin Cities, where Armajani, Iranian by birth, came to attend college in 1960 and has remained ever since. But this excellent presentation, way beyond "long overdue," was Armajani's first solo gallery show in the area. The exhibition featured three of his signature architectural-sculptural constructions, along with a nice local touch, a cycle of drawings showing the Mississippi River in each of the four seasons.

Thirty years ago Armajani included a tiny model of a dormer with an open window in his "Dictionary for Building" series. The charm of that early effort is gone in the new large-scale version, *Dormer* (2004), a steel-and-glass construction that offers visual openness leading to social and psychological



Siah Armajani: *Dormer*, 2004, steel, glass and mixed media, 9 by 8 by 18 feet; at Weinstein.

darkness: the metal cot, rolled-up mattress and pillow that are visible inside suggest imprisonment, with viewing transformed into surveillance. At best the cramped garret might be a second-class room for a boarder or servant.

In *Dormer*, a model of an old-fashioned structure (possibly a grain elevator) rests at the head of the bed, as if to embody a dream of a less disturbing world. Similarly, *One Car Garage* (2004) includes an antique toy truck and small models of a concrete grain elevator and an old-style commercial building, marking the distance between the populism and love of vernacular that informed Armajani's earlier art and the chill at the heart of these recent creations. With its doors covered by bars, the garage seems less a relic of the days before McMansions and multicar garages (which the title implies) than a symbol of post-9/11 Fortress America. It harbors an empty chair, an image of absence and isolation.

A third construction, the glass-and-metal *Fireplace* (2000), also examines a single architectural unit. In comparison with the other two works it seems neutral, a formal and conceptual exercise that comes close to suggesting a postmodern take on moderne elegance. The maquette for this work, however, provides a reminder of Armajani's humor, with a pencil serving as the flue.

The drawings combine the Middle West and the Middle East, the mighty Mississippi and a jeweled mosaic style that recalls Persian miniatures. As in Johns, the seasons are a vehicle for virtuosity and

meditative reflection. Blending lyricism and playfulness, with laundry blowing on the line in one and a scarecrow and (unfazed) crows in another, the drawings were the perfect complement to the disquieting character of the two major new works.

—Robert Silberman

DALLAS

Neal Slavin at Photographs Do Not Bend

Girners are people who make funny faces. When Neal Slavin photographed the Gary Owens Society of Girners, he grouped five of them at a table, each making his or her distinctive funny face, while Owens, the announcer for the TV program "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In" (1968-73), sat stoically in their midst. Wearing their club sweatshirts and gurning away, the society members have a certain timeless quality. But the presence of a youngish Mr. Owens in his shiny polyester shirt places us firmly in the mid-1970s.

Christopher Leitch: *here. upside down and backward*, 2005, pencil, charcoal, chalk and gouache powder on paper, 22 by 30 inches; at Jan Weiner.



Neal Slavin: *Society of Girners*, 1974, digital C-print, 16 by 20 inches; at Photographs Do Not Bend.

down and backwards with orange chalk in a clumsy cursive script, vibrates within a black charcoal aura on a ground of white pigment rubbed in by hand. A period at the end of the word renders it a statement of fact, in tension with the ghostly loops of letters below the surface that suggest it was a struggle to get "here." Leitch created several other pieces with his eyes closed, and chose colors by pulling strips of paper from a bowl. In some drawings he used his right hand, in others his left.

Buddhist ideas of being in the moment and relinquishing control are a primary influence on Leitch's methods. Collisions of materials—the deliberately powdery minglings of chalk, charcoal and white pigment—also form part of his repertory. In *why, upside down and backwards*, Leitch soaked the