

ART QUIPS

Writing Outside the Mainstream

Gary Rough "I Want To Tell You" at Number 35

by Jill Conner
3.25.2009

When the art market was booming, everyone wanted to be visible. To be seen was to be known, and in the world of it's not WHAT you know but WHO you know, opportunities bounded forth. As the art community continues to work in the shadow of the decadent era that came to a screeching halt once the financial markets fell apart, it is establishing a new location quite prominently throughout the internet rather than at bars, cafes, magazines and advertisements. In fact, social networking sites like Facebook have connected many disparate art critics and artists with one another, allowing for a series of interesting conversations. Gary Rough's exhibition at NUMBER 35 entitled "I Want To Tell You" focuses on the odd yet disappointing contradictions that arise when freedom and ownership collide.

Within the gallery's tiny space, that is slightly larger than a postage stamp, Rough covered each wall with torn pages from a small paperback book: George Orwell's fictional narrative 1984. Published in 1949, Orwell rendered a metaphorical critique of Stalin's Soviet Union that focused on the hypocrisy of the government's outward promise of freedom--attractive to so many intellectuals in the West such as Doris Lessing and John Berger--while political dissidents were pushed to the margins and eliminated from humanity.

Rough utilizes Orwell's critique as further warning to those of us who have grown comfortable with our own lives, particularly the internet. What initially felt like the New Frontier quickly became a collection of established points that are monitored by a series of third parties. Rough's installation also includes a series of framed collages and drawings that reflect a redundant, border-line state of mind. "Taking/Giving (13)," for instance, is an extensive collage of the number 13 and appears three times in the show, as if it is a larger component of the artist's "Failed Pattern,"-series.

One cannot help but feel jailed within this claustrophobic environment as mirrors reflect the gallery's windows, emphasizing the limited space that one is standing in. The last piece, however, titled "Family Portrait," from 2003 consists of mirrors placed within the small frames that are intended to render a larger, photographic family portrait. Rough's use of mirrors, however, reflect the wall on the other side of the room and, once the viewer passes in front, emphasizes that participation in the internet is also complicit with the larger online voyeuristic process. With respect to Facebook, the digital relationships have been relatively carefree, but the corporation of Facebook itself has not only attempted to make everyone's visual content their own, but others have since complained about censorship and limitations set upon a mode of communication that was initially thought to be free.