

The New York Times

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KAREN ROSENBERG Art in Review

Adam Adach Karin Sander

In this pair of solo shows, two midcareer European artists use painting to convey the experience of international travel.

The Warsaw painter Adam Adach spent three months living and working in the Bronx, drawing on his own photographs of the area, as well as on newspaper clippings detailing major events in Europe. His imagery veers from meditative portraits of children hefting stones on the beach to a masked protester hurling rocks during the most recent G8 summit.

Mr. Adach means to elide the distance between Eastern Europe and the Bronx, though his paintings might scare off visitors to both regions.

Three large paintings of Pelham Bay have flattened, semi-abstract passages that recall Peter Doig's science-fiction-inspired landscapes. "Day After/Pelham Bay/Just Before Sunset" (2007) laces the garbage-strewn shoreline with radioactive yellow-orange. Sooty grays prevail in the historical scenes, with one memorable exception: the aftermath of a chemical spill, depicted as a shower of pastel confetti.

In the smaller Project Gallery, the German artist Karin Sander has installed a new group of her "Mailed Paintings": primed, store-bought canvases sent from international locations without any kind of protective covering. A rectangular painting sent from Colombia has nary a scratch, while a circular one that passed through Bonn and Berlin in Germany and Gmuden, Austria, bears a Fontana-esque slash.

These bruised and fingerprinted monochromes bring to mind the recent acts of violence against works of art in a Swedish gallery and a French museum. Here, the responsibility lies with the artist, or maybe the post office. KAREN ROSENBERG

Through Nov. 3 at D'Amelio Terras, 525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; (212) 352-9400.

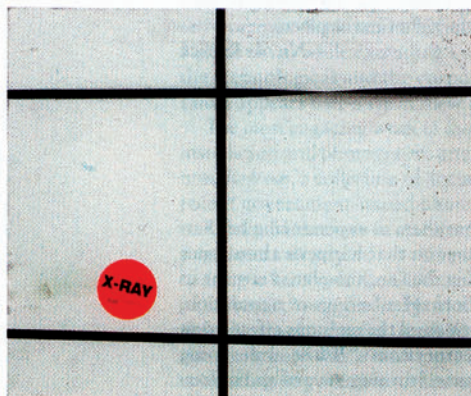
ARTFORUM

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Karin Sander

D'AMELIO TERRAS

Karin Sander, *Mailed Painting Berlin–New York*, 2007, primed canvas, plastic tape, and sticker, 19¼ x 23¾". From the series "Mailed Paintings," 2006–.



In 1926, Edward Steichen tried to bring his version of Constantin Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, 1923, into New York on the occasion of the sculptor's retrospective, only to have the work held up at customs on the grounds that it was not art but a duty-entitled industrial implement—a kitchen utensil. As the story goes, Steichen had to pay a heavy tax, as did Marcel Duchamp when he imported another Brancusi some weeks later. The verdict in Steichen's case was subsequently

overturned when a court decreed that, despite its not looking particularly like a bird, the work was "nevertheless pleasing to look at and highly ornamental," evidence that it was made by a "professional sculptor." Redeemed by formalism, Brancusi's abstraction substantiated technique and harbored intention—a kind of saving grace whether it was manifested expressively or not. Quaint—or just typically avant-gardist—as this episode appears, it nevertheless foregrounds the legal and economic inviolability of borders (more so than the questioning of

aesthetics its controversy once implied) and resonates in an era marked by dislocation and the wayward exigencies of exchange.

Karin Sander's most recent New York show reimagined modernist fantasies of fluid transnationalism as, well, mail art. Indeed, Sander's "Mailed Paintings," 2006–, is a series of white-primed, store-bought canvases that the artist sent to the gallery from far-flung locations (Berlin predominates, but Colombia, Japan, Iceland, and Finland also appear). The deliberate omission of any protective wrapping meant that the panels were numbered, bruised, torn, stamped with X-ray and priority insignia, and abraded by stretcher bars in transit, forever branded with the marks of their dispatch. Very much in the spirit of Duchamp's own *Large Glass*, 1915–23, declared completed once broken in transit, each component of "Mailed Paintings" was declared "done" on arrival at the gallery. A kind of telegraphic communiqué bespeaking a diaristic narrative of transport, every airmail sticker or bar code accumulated along the way indexes the work's passage and constitutes its forlorn composition. While *Mailed Painting Colombia–New York*, 2007, has nary a scratch (having been boxed up by FedEx), *Mailed Painting Berlin–New York*, 2007, is bordered by blue tape; *Mailed Painting Berlin–New York*, 2006–2007, and *Mailed Painting*

Helsinki–New York, 2007, are bisected by tic-tac-toe-like grids of plastic straps; and *Mailed Painting Bonn–Gmuden–Berlin–New York*, 2007, is slashed à la Lucio Fontana.

In their vulnerability to the vicissitudes of shipment, the works in "Mailed Paintings" make clear the series' relation to Sander's other work, most specifically the larger series, "The Patina Paintings," 1988–, to which it belongs along with her "Gebrauchsbilder" (Pictures for Use), 1988–. ("Gebrauchsbilder," too, began as a set of blank canvases; but, owing to their unlikely sites of manufacture—settings such as a coal cellar or the deck of a ship—they incorporate traces of their surroundings.) But they also follow from her wall-based interventions, the best known of which involved her polishing sections of walls to a lacquerlike finish, producing a nominal art of the infra-thin. Yet Sander's appropriations extend beyond ready-made materials and institutional sites to historiography, or, more precisely, the history of art history: From Kasimir Malevich or Robert Rauschenberg's monochromes to On Kawara's postcards, "Mailed Paintings" responds to a litany of precedents. But to Sander's credit, even as she inevitably invokes such forerunners, her paintings don't collapse under their referential weight. Instead, what makes "Mailed Paintings" more than merely clever *are* its surfaces, as restrained and "pleasing to look at" as Brancusi's—even without a single mark of paint.

—Suzanne Hudson

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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GALLERIES—CHELSEA

KARIN SANDER

Mail art is typically intimate, an exchange of handmade in-jokes between friends. Putting an austere globalist spin on the genre, the German Conceptualist bought prefab canvases and shipped them, unwrapped and blank (save for shipping labels on the back), from various international locations (Berlin, Bonn, Helsinki) to her gallery. The result is abstraction by happenstance. Blue, green, black, and white plastic straps crisscross into grids, offset by gestural-looking stains and hard-edged bar codes. There's a giant X on one large tondo, where the stretcher bars abraded the canvas en route. Priority and airmail stickers grace some like readymade signatures. Through Nov. 3. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)