

Art in Review; Gabriel Vormstein

By ROBERTA SMITH

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Casey Kaplan

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Despite a title said in the press release to be a typographical rendering of the gallery's floor plan, Gabriel Vormstein's second solo show in New York has an engaging free-spiritedness and modesty, although both seem slightly feigned.

This young German artist limits himself to ephemeral and eccentric materials, including wire and twigs and, most often, watercolor and gouache on big sheets of newsprint (mostly Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung). Nearly everything involves brightly colored tape, whether applied to paper in abstract designs or used to hold wall sculptures together.

Thus constrained, Mr. Vormstein rifles through art history, from Post-Impressionism to Minimalism. His watercolors of waifish young women can bring to mind the figures of Schiele and Klimt, while elongated combinations of tape and magazine pages suggest Wiener Werkstätte and De Stijl geometries. There's some Dada insouciance here, a reference to van Gogh there, a Cubist still life elsewhere. Two of the most beautiful works are "A Song for X After He's X," which involves a musical score made of wire and cherries, and an untitled sculpture that uses soil, sugar, cardboard, a Ping-Pong ball and cereal to suggest a dead and decaying body, possibly that of a fallen drummer boy, under snow.

Mr. Vormstein's feeling for slight, impoverished materials and his emphasis on drawing are shared with many of his contemporaries. But his historicist mixing and matching seems typical of an older generation of male, German painters. It makes an intriguing combination that could develop in several directions, not all equally interesting. ROBERTA SMITH