

Art in America

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Gareth James at American Fine Arts

To prove that elaborate sculpture can, like origami, be made from a single sheet of paper, Gareth James cuts and folds large sheets of drafting paper and

assembles them into recognizable objects. Each is modeled on a published photograph that documents some arcane bit of historical information. Four recent examples are based on a now-defunct monument, a building destroyed by bombing, a caged truck and an image of a bookcase abstracted from a movie. The first three are presented in 2-foot Plexiglas cubes.

Enclosed and mirrored in its case, *A. Sweat Equity* (some other titles begin with "B" or "C") consists of a small paper cottage encased by a larger paper temple, its columns leaning toward collapse. The image derives from a newspaper tear sheet that, at the gallery, was labeled as a discrete object and fixed to a wall. This vintage image shows Staten Island's Garibaldi-Meucci Museum, briefly home to Antonio Meucci, an Italian inventor, and Giuseppe Garibaldi, guerrilla fighter of the Italian Risorgimento. The cottage had been enshrined for 50 years within a Pantheon of stucco and wood, and functioned as a historic site until the temple's destruction. James's title draws on the headline of an article from

the same newspaper page, "How Sweat Equity Pays Off in California Housing." The story concludes with a reference to two successful homebuilders who propose as their next project a pair of dollhouses built inside a garage; James apparently considers this a parallel to the Staten Island folly. He included a schematic drawing for the paper sculpture and named it *Teletrofano*, commemorating Meucci's claim to the invention of the telephone.

A. Jerusalem/May 2001 is based on a newspaper photograph illustrating an article on a bombing in Israel. James replicates three ruined floors in paper, and supports them with a single paper pylon. The paper vehicle and elaborate fencing of *A. Defended Truck, Downtown, Los Angeles, 1975* derive from a photograph in a book not on display depicting a panel truck penned by cyclone fencing and security wire. A full-scale paper bookcase leaned perilously away from the gallery's far wall, mirrored on panels of Plexiglas that rested on the floor. Made from a vast single sheet of

paper, the 10-by-7-by-2-foot bookshelf titled *Zabriskie Point* represents the detritus and rubble of capitalism, including such a bookcase from the apocalyptic explosion that concludes Michelangelo Antonioni's 1970 film of the same name. Complex in its ideation, multiply referential in construction, James's project enshrines the oddities that mark the ebb and flow of culture.

—Edward Leffingwell

View of Gareth James's *A. Sweat Equity*, 2004, paper, Plexiglas, mixed mediums, 24 by 24 by 24 inches; at American Fine Arts.

