

ARTFORUM

New York

CRITICS' PICKS

David Joselit and Gareth James

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

545 West 20th Street

September 09–September 16

In preparation for "Late Night Legal Formalities," a unique collaboration between British artist Gareth James and art historian David Joselit, James requested that Joselit view each of Elizabeth Dee Gallery's exhibitions in 2005 and produce a short text in response. Joselit chose to deliver his contribution as an informal e-mail, which James has redeployed here as subtitles to the first chapter of Lars von Trier's film *Manderlay* (2005). The cacophonous relationship between the movie's own dialogue and Joselit's remarks is both humorous and irritating, underlining the often-frustrating *differend* between methods of critical and artistic judgment. (It helps that the film's Brechtian narrative techniques function here as a sort of opening or adhesive for Joselit's text.) "Does criticism matter to you?" asks Joselit near the end of his contribution. It's an intriguing, almost accusatory question in the context of an exhibition devoted to interrogating the relationship between art and its attendant critical discourses, and it reveals numerous tensions between the two fields. One can easily imagine asking in return, "Does art matter to you?" Joselit addresses this question with notable ambivalence in his e-mail. In a sharp play on Adrian Piper's video installation *Cornered*, 1988—now on view in the Whitney's "Full House" exhibition—James has precariously balanced the television set playing *Manderlay* atop two tipped folding chairs, further complicating the pedagogical and racially charged content of the film. While some of the artistic choices remain enigmatic, Joselit and James's tangential dialogue is rewarding in its numerous provocations.



Installation view, 2006.

—David Velasco
