

# Art in America

## Kevin Landers at Elizabeth Dee

Kevin Landers so consistently hits the spot that, sooner or later, people will have to stop describing his photographs as "snapshots." Although his images have the spontaneity and haphazard composition of an untrained amateur's, they are too pointed and too funny to be mistaken for mere accidents. In this, his sixth solo in New York since 1993, he showed sculptures along with C-prints measuring 2 to 4 feet in the largest dimension, all dated 2002. Landers continues to scour city streets, finding fleeting poetry amid urban detritus. But this time around he is also mining the history of photography, collecting influences as varied as William Eggleston and Andreas Gursky as if they were empty soda cans ready for redemption.

Like Eggleston, Landers provides an antidote to optical amnesia, finding inspiration in sights usually overlooked or ignored. Pedestrians rushing in the rain would certainly miss the Richteresque abstraction captured in *Untitled (Broom Sweeping Sludge, New York)*, in which a cheesy plastic broom cannot stop the tides of dirty water splashing over the asphalt curbside. And who would pause to examine a sewer drain crammed with cigarette butts, candy wrappers and scraps of chewed-up paper? In *Untitled (Grate, New York)*, Landers crops the image so that the precise grid of metal slots perfectly frames the chaos of trash. Landers's iconoclastic wit, often targeted at art-savvy audiences, is what separates these images, and the others in this tightly organized show, from the mountains of pretentious street scenes that photographers have taken ever since Eggleston stationed himself on the streets of Memphis in the 1960s.

In Landers's world, an aisle of birdcages at an outdoor flea market or a bag of pressed napkins falling out of the back of a laundry truck can tell us more about "the grid" than any carefully constructed abstract canvas. Gursky has been much touted for similar insights, albeit with prints of mon-

umental scale. So it is not surprising that Landers takes on Gursky not through photography but with a wall of 60 sneakers, each handmade from felt and plasticine—a replication of Gursky's photograph of Niketown. But as opposed to Gursky's billboard-sized advertisements of consumer culture, Landers looks for the possibilities of recyclables. Two other sculptures in the exhibition—a wire-framed shopping cart filled with collapsed umbrellas and a stack of chairs—are also handmade by the artist and convey an awkward pathos closer to a Claes Oldenburg than a Jeff Koons.

For Landers, the American consumer is found on Delancey Street, not browsing at Prada, as he reveals in *Untitled (Man with Plaid Cart, New York)*. This figure, like a Duane Hanson sculpture, is unaware that his cheap brown coat or gaudy shopping cart might be subjects of ridicule. Landers's everyman, like the photographer himself, seems happy to ignore good taste or fashion trends but is willing to stop for a moment for the promise of a photograph.

—Barbara Pollack

Kevin Landers: *Sneakers*, 2002, 60 felt-and-plasticine "shoes," 77 by 138 by 4 inches overall; at Elizabeth Dee.

