



'Happenstance'

Harris Lieberman

This elliptically themed but provocative group show provided evidence that giving up control has its advantages. Each of the 30 photographs and sculptures in the exhibition relied, to some degree or another, on chance events.

Michael Queenland contributed two of the most compelling works. The hardware-store purchases of a stranger—a bottle of Ajax, a hammer, and some insecticide—are the subject of his photograph *Untitled (Killer)*, 2005, a modern-day, low-rent still life as ominous as it is forlorn and just a little ridiculous. Queenland also perched 12 brooms on their bristles, allowing them to fall randomly throughout the show's duration. Although nothing was keeping them up, two miraculously remained standing for most of the show, like stubborn endurance athletes.

Unforeseen disaster showed up in Amir Zaki's *Despalloc* (2005), three photographs of a Los Angeles house destroyed by a mudslide after heavy rains. Two are straight photojournalism, so one almost misses the strange fissures in the digitally altered third, in which the artist has inserted a chain-link fence in the middle of green hills. Zaki's work shares an understated surrealism with Shana Lutker's series of photographs of sculptures, *Art That I Dreamt That I Made* (2005), for which the artist built objects from her dreams: a yellow paper ball, a tiny bus with flying buttresses of paper, a bench. Mediated by the camera, they remain ghostly and inaccessible.

Conceived by independent curator Lauri Firstenberg, the show—as tidy, leached of color, and full of potential as an empty apartment—emphasized an overall look and feel rather than any common subject matter. The objects and



Michael Queenland, *Untitled (Killer)*, 2005, color print, 24" x 20". Harris Lieberman.

images spoke to one another like 30 strangers in a bar who are all friends with the bartender. This discovery of consensus among apparently random objects felt unlikely, serendipitous, and sweetly optimistic.

—Carly Berwick