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Review: Robby Herbst at David Patton Gallery

6:30 AM, April 3, 2009



Given the frequency with which one tends to see Robby Herbst's name around town — in conjunction with the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, which he co-founded, as well as in group shows, performances, discussions and presentations — it is a little surprising that his current exhibition at [David Patton Gallery](#) is his first solo show.

He doesn't seem entirely comfortable with the idea,

judging from the show's title — "Blockades (with collaborators)" — and the prominence with which those "collaborators" (presumably the subjects in his drawings) are listed in the show's news release.

He is an artist working, by and large, in that fertile outer sphere of the art world, where aesthetics begin to overlap with other, more tangible practices and concerns, and who insists on maintaining the permeability of these divisions. The solo show seems less a goal than the incidental outgrowth of a larger project.

The show consists of seven mid-sized drawings depicting individuals engaged in acts of civil disobedience, as well as a small installation of cutout figures accompanied by the audio recording of a man fervently extolling the evils of fast food, corporate agriculture and other signs of social decline. The titles provide the basic circumstantial details: "Tom Blocks War Contractor Parsons in Pasadena," "Nancy Stops Traffic at 2 Freeway Ramp," "Charles Talks With Women at Recruiting Center About Suicide Rates Among Soldiers," "Jen Knits in First Street."

The drawings themselves are handsomely executed, with portions of each image rendered in skillful detail and the remainder left either in outline or blank.

More striking than their skill, however, is their air of humility. These are audacious acts by committed individuals, at a time when public sentiment tends to disparage all civic action as futile and nostalgic. In emphasizing the role of the body as a tool of conscientious resistance — a potential blockade — Herbst's drawings honor (without unduly romanticizing) not only those individuals but also the spirit of the acts and the principles on which they are grounded.

-- Holly Myers

David Patton Gallery, 932 Chung King Road, L.A., (213) 626-2524, through April 18. Closed Sundays through Wednesdays.

Above: "Tom Blocks War Contractor Parsons in Pasadena" (detail) (2009), pencil on paper. Credit: David Patton Gallery

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