

# ArtReview

May 2015

Sebastian Lloyd Rees *Vendor*

*Room East, New York 22 February – 29 March*

The objects hanging in this gallery travelled all over the world to be here. In fact, a number of them are accompanied by a FedEx slip or envelope bearing Room East's Lower East Side address and various locations for the artist. Rees sent the baskets, cardboard boxes, newspapers and other ephemera on show from India; here they are arranged in the space, either hanging as two-dimensional work or reconfigured to make sculptures.

Rees's recent visit to Mumbai included daily trips to a variety of markets and 'sites throughout the slums of the city' (so states the press release) in order to gather material. One wall is painted a mustardy 'Indian Yellow' (according to the checklist), and atop it is green plywood used by builders to fence off a construction site, which Rees found in New York and repurposes here as a large abstract painting folded across the corner of the gallery (both are part of *Hoarding 2015 (Varick Ave by Meadow St 24 January 13:56)*, 2015).

The poor materials are not transformed by being placed in the gallery space. They resist

the aura that the white cube so often imparts. But the fact that the works don't quite fit the gallery does not mean that they do what Rees thinks they do, which is to give a voice or a presence to those people who used or made these things. This is most obvious in an installation titled *Ragpickers' Court* (2015), in which nine wooden hands emerge from sleeves made of cheap fabrics and connect to broken pieces of timber. It's jarring because its politics are off: the hands do not assert any kind of voice or presence. Divorced from their local context, these objects read like a detached statement: someone else's call, or capitulation.

This is not the first exhibition in which Rees, who also makes work collaboratively with Ali Eisa under the name Lloyd Corporation, has exhibited barely treated found matter. Historically it's been a strong tool to treat objects as a kind of archaeology, to channel sociopolitical situations by shifting them from the street into the gallery. In the case of his 2014 solo show at Duve gallery in Berlin, for example, objects

found in different industrial sites in the German capital invoked the state of dying industries in Western cities and the rise of the service economy. In this show, however, the result is exoticism. The ideas Rees points to here – hoarding, debris, repurposing, urban space – are relevant in any contemporary society. Global North and South alike, but they're not addressed critically in this body of work. Rees's focus on poor materials like cardboard, wire and baskets that he collects and brings over to the West from the 'slums' of India (so it says in the press release) does not flag the global nature of these environmental issues but rather highlights their foreignness to a Western audience.

The promise of Rees's work at the moment is not its content but its methodology. He updates the relationship between found material and the gallery as a charged site. This has been a rich field of discussion for a long time, and Rees could have a strong voice in it if he decides to be less of a tourist and more of a thinker.

*Orit Gat*



*Followers* (detail), 2015, paint, mask, cardboard, dimensions variable.  
Courtesy the artist and Room East, New York