

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS



PATRICIA SMITH:  
KICK-ASS PLAN FOR A  
CULTURAL PRESERVATION  
TANK, 2008, INK ON  
PAPER, 13 BY 20 INCHES;  
AT FRONT ROOM.

### PATRICIA SMITH FRONT ROOM

Patricia Smith makes exquisitely drawn "maps" of such intangibles as psychological terrains, emotional states and locales in the societal nexus. In her second show at Brooklyn's Front Room gallery, she presented medium- and large-scale drawings that resemble both old maps (you expect them to read "Middle-earth") and renderings of ornate wrought iron or metalwork. Evoking print illustrations in vintage books, they are executed in a muted palette using ink and watercolor, and are composed of small dots and lines, with areas of subtle shading and mottled, aged-looking surfaces. Each floats on an expanse of heavy paper that at times suggests vellum. The elegance of the drawings was thwarted only by their display in clunky wooden vitrines that were incongruous in style and spirit, but

were perhaps intended to lend an air of institutional prestige.

Some of the images have an organic, amoebic quality while others suggest flowing garlands, historical architecture or the plan of a fortified compound. The form of *All-Purpose Mourning Stadium* (2008), for example, resembles a tadpole- or sperm-shaped medieval fortress topped with red pennants. The inner sanctum is surrounded by concentric walls labeled "Inconsolable Grief," "Free-floating Sadness," "Vague Depression," which are slightly separated by an "Empathy Gap" from the outer walls of "Bland Indifference" and "Spectacle Gazers." Smith's locales are sometimes humorous, as with the drawing for the broochlike *Swag Palace* (2007), whose subhead designates it "Admittance Restricted." It has chambers for "V.I.P.s," "Flesh Trophies" and their "Luxe Stash"; their attendant characteristics "Guarded" and "Vulnerable"; and the brash must-have accessories "Bling" and "Hooch."

At the heart of the diagram for *Kick-Ass Plan for a Cultural Preservation Tank* (2008) is "The Trough of Production," which is connected by hairlike lines to smaller surrounding areas where the likes of "Profiteers," "Fashionists," "Conformists," "Naysayers," "Revelers" and "Lost Souls" can be found. Topped by a fanciful burst labeled "Winning Big," the cultural outlook turns increasingly grim as one works one's way down,

as if through an intestinal tract, finally arriving at "Willed Oblivion" and, at bottom, "Stoppered."

Smith's drawings hint at a certain disenchantment with social constructs as well as a compelling need to order and label, as if to make sense of things illogical (like the seeming arbitrariness of who "wins big" in the art world). She plots the geography of the mind, giving physical "space" to thoughts and established notions in an admirable attempt to gain perspective, and perhaps maintain a healthy critical distance.

—Stephanie Cash