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Art in Review; Hernan Bas

By HOLLAND COTTER

Dandies, Pansies & Prudes
Daniel Reich Gallery, Chelsea
537A West 23rd Street
Through April 8

Christian Holstad
Leather Beach
Daniel Reich Temporary Space
200 East 43rd Street, Manhattan
Through May 1

'Between the Lines'

Daniel Reich Gallery Temporary Space at the Chelsea Hotel
222 West 23rd Street, Room 103 (second floor), Chelsea
Through April 8

Daniel Reich's gallery was like no other when it opened in his Chelsea studio apartment in 2003. The work he showed there -- small, finely wrought, but scrappy and pack-ratty -- seemed ideally suited to the space. For that reason, when he moved to a standard white box on West 23rd Street, nothing quite seemed to jell for a while. But now the growing pains are over, and Mr. Reich has landed on his feet with one of the most interesting programs of any gallery in town.

More accurately, he has landed on several feet, as he is operating out of three spaces, two of them temporary. In his permanent gallery on West 23rd Street, he has new paintings by the Miami-based Hernan Bas, pictures of willowy young men filtered through screens of swipecy, streaky acrylic and gouache. Some people find Mr. Bas's work slight and derivative; I do not. To me, his paintings are elements in a larger, continuous conceptual-performance piece about being gay in 21st-century America. He understands that "gay" is a larger and more interesting category than "artist," and one still embattled and historically underexplored. I value whatever he brings to that history.

I feel exactly the same about another Reich artist, Christian Holstad. His current show, "Leather Beach," installed in a former delicatessen on the corner of East 43rd Street and Third Avenue, is a zany brilliant meditation on the urban leather culture that achieved critical mass in the pre-AIDS 1970's before fading from view. To some observers, its diminishment indicates a mainstreaming of gay self-perception. But Mr. Holstad complicates and resists such a possibility with an array of hand-stitched faux-leather gear that incorporates pompons, chains, human hair and glitter, and bonds Tim of Finland to the Cockettes. By diving deep into queer history, Mr. Holstad helps initiate a new history. In his art, "gay" gets its groove back.

Finally, at Mr. Reich's third space, a suite at the Chelsea Hotel, the artist Nick Mauss has assembled an excellent group show. It includes Ken Okiishi's shrewd homages to David Wojnarowicz and a beautiful drawing by the too-little-seen Daniel McDonald. There is a bright newcomer in Kianja Strobert, and two European artists -- Tariq Alvi and Paulina Ołowska -- ripe for New York solos. The plum presence, though, is Lorraine O'Grady, one of the most interesting American conceptual artists around. And it makes total sense that she would fall within the unpredictably spinning Reich compass. **HOLLAND COTTER**