



EXHIBITION REVIEWS

TIM KNOWLES BITFORMS AND THE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

British artist Tim Knowles's first solo exhibition in New York, "Recorded Delivery," is billed as "a collaborative project with UK Royal Mail." The centerpiece of the show, *Post Box E3-HS9* (2011), was a cardboard shipping box, unremarkable on the outside, that hung on the wall. Along with an audio recorder and a GPS device, it holds two cameras that can photograph the parcel's surroundings through tiny apertures. In 2008, Knowles mailed *E3-HS9* on a 20-hour, 902-mile journey from his London studio to the Isle of Barra, in the Outer Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland. The cameras took photos every 12 seconds, resulting in 20,000 images, a selection of which were on view.

On his website (where you can view video made from the photographs), Knowles describes the piece as "revealing the unseen world of Royal Mail." As it turns out, this mysterious realm is pretty humdrum. In the gallery, dozens

of inkjet prints on the walls, from a few inches to a few feet on a side, document the journey. They reveal sometimes blurry, sometimes bleached-out views of portly Mail employees and drab fluorescent-lit interiors marked by sorting bins and concrete floors, all witnessed by *E3-HS9* in its travels. The online video reveals that the trip was punctuated by long, dark stretches in trucks and planes. There aren't many surprises, and in the end it's all a bit earnest and dutiful.

That said, Knowles's piece has a range of art historical precedents and resonates with other recent work. It recalls Robert Morris's *Box With the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), as well as Walead Beshty's glass boxes, which are made to the size of FedEx packages and shipped in them, cracking as they travel. Karin Sander's *Mailed Paintings* travel too, and show the evidence in wear and tear.

Some of the work in "for the Baron," at the Horticultural Society, similarly ceded the means of art-making to objects, with funnier results. The show

was named for the title character in Calvino's novel *A Baron in the Trees* (1957), who forgoes the palace in favor of an arboreal existence. Knowles created a series of "Tree Drawings" (2005 and 2006) by tying pens to low-hanging branches, which, swaying in the breeze, create abstract compositions on a sheet on an easel set beneath the tree. The drawings are shown alongside deadpan photographs of the setup.

Other works explored seed dispersal and environmental restoration, including *Restorative Device #1* (2011), which included a custom-made "seed suit," recalling Joseph Beuys, with pouches that gradually let seeds fall to earth as Knowles wears the suit on walks through neglected urban areas. Finally, in a group of tiny sculptures from 2011, *Winged Seeds*, the artist attached feathers to seeds to aid them on their journey. Another piece of art, like *E3-HS9*, sent out into the world.

—Brian Boucher