

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Johnson, Ken. 'Art in Review; Kelley Walker'. *The New York Times Online*. 17 March 2006

The New York Times

Art in Review; Kelley Walker

Paula Cooper Gallery 521 West 21st Street, Chelsea Through March 25

Kelley Walker's work has appeared on the cover of Artforum magazine, and he has paintings in this year's Whitney Biennial. Pondering the repellent riffs on Koons and Warhol that comprise his second New York solo exhibition, you may wonder why.

The most conspicuous works pertain to race. They include enlargements of Michael Jackson's police mug shot; blown-up covers of an African-American men's magazine that were partly smeared with whitening toothpaste before being enlarged; and silkscreen paintings based, like Warhol's "Race Riot" paintings, on an early 60's photograph of a police dog attacking an African-American civil rights demonstrator. Mr. Kelley reproduced his image in shades of red, poured melted chocolate over the canvases and displayed them upside down. (The Biennial pictures are from this series.)

Sheet metal sculptures laser-cut to mimic the circulating-arrow symbol for recycling tell us what this all means: that under the reign of capitalist consumerism, everything from food products to images of racial strife is subject to recycling, recirculation and loss of meaning. Everything we believe and care about is junk. That is not hard to figure out.

What's puzzling is the play with racially charged materials. Outside the art world, a white person like Mr. Walker making an artwork by pouring real chocolate over an image of racial tragedy could be seen as offensive to say the least. Why is this not so inside the art world? That said, whether you regard it as misguided, opportunistic or daring, Mr. Walker's appropriation and manipulation of racially problematic imagery does give some provocative energy to a fashionably cynical but otherwise tired, empty and academic enterprise.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/17/arts/art-in-review-kelley-walker.html>

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