

## Quoin tricks

When Ishmael Randall Weeks creates the ruins of ancient civilizations, he is not looking back. A fragile gray table thrust up against a wall holds a gray sculptural geometry. The crowded city has room for its monuments, compressed into an oddly small space like collectibles. It looks impressive, even with pyramids shorn of their peaks, if neither exactly grim nor monumental. Paper pulp lends the gray a lightly mottled tone. One may wish that one could pick up the pieces and start reading, perhaps to learn their history, but this text has had to sacrifice its words.

Randall Weeks has a reputation for found materials, especially magazines and books. Not that he is all that worried about recycled paper or even **book art**. Rather, he is mapping physical spaces and their human history—in words, objects, images, and memories. Not surprisingly, he also ends up dislocating them and, just maybe, the viewer. He calls an entire show "Quoin," and he could well be happy that I had to look the word up. For the record, it means the brick and stone of architectural corners and angles, not unlike the gray.



Politics is very much a part of *this* history, only not so easy to pin down. The ruins may or may not refer to the artist's birthplace, Peru, and capitalism or imperialism may or may not have contributed to their decay. A signature work cuts and shapes a small paperback library—something of a guided tour of Latin American politics all by itself. It has something in common with Renée Green's hipster college course, *Import/Export Funk Office*, in "**Blues for Smoke**" at the Whitney. Suspended from

the ceiling, its mass could pass for an aircraft carrier on patrol of **Caribbean art**. On the other side from the spines, its layers become geological strata.

Two works approach painting, with just as elusive a history. One shares its small rectangles, their irregular placement on the wall, and their soft brown with the sepia-toned photographs of **Lorna Simpson**. Actual photographs, both on the wall and projected as an old-fashioned slide show, travel through distant landscapes. Randall Weeks outlines a roughly trapezoidal portion of each, whether finding or imposing a cryptic order. *Cuts, Burns, Punctures*, a projection in the marvelous basement "lab" of the Drawing Center, is that much more vivid but just as anonymous. It seems only right that the slim film loop keeps getting caught in the reels.

Becky Beasley and Alicja Kwade, too, move between formal and global spaces. Beasley calls her three black Plexiglas sheets, slightly cantilevered from one another on the floor, her *Steppes*. Two photos of organic waste heaps in Athens seem displaced between continents and between nature's course and humanity's footprint. That theme continues in a postcard rack, which also takes one to her native United Kingdom. The plants may grow just as they appear on each one, but they seem right out of the tradition of English gardens waiting for the sun. And then the back gives them a stricter scientific description, with room no doubt for your address.

Kwade's displacements stick to the space and time of the gallery, even as more pretentious art stars like **Doug Aitken** and **Urs Fischer** are knocking them down. Bronze pipes twine together as they rise on the wall and spread out on the floor, while a white door curves back into a column, as if to support the actual ceiling or to shut on itself. A mirror lies shattered, its pieces still almost fitting together into their rectangle—already an exemplar of *entropy*, that favorite word of **Robert Smithson**, and yet defying it. And then one notices a second mirror elsewhere with exactly the same shapes and cracks. Its reflection in a third mirror, she suggests, could explain everything, except maybe an actual makeup mirror bent archly nearer the entrance. Different as they are, these artists share their Minimalist spareness and materials, like maps of the Lower East Side abstracted away from the bars and the galleries.