



Cary S. Leibowitz/Candyass, Installation view, Candyass Carnival, 1991. Courtesy Stux Gallery.

A self-conscious type of cultural and aesthetic populism is demonstrated (and celebrated) in Cary Leibowitz/Candyass's new work, *The Candyass Carnival*. The artist transformed Stux (October 19–November 16) into what might be described as an art carnival where a seemingly endless accumulation of Leibowitz/Candyass's paintings, objects, and knickknacks is organized (or disorganized) into a situation of barely contained chaos. Fun and games with an undercurrent of social, sexual, political, and autobiographical critique is the aim of this "environment," which featured (among other elements) a kissing booth, a raffle, and a display of the artist's multiples, reasonably priced at about \$50 a pop. Furthermore, the atmosphere of participation extended into the realm of aesthetic language itself, wherein Leibowitz/Candyass collaborated with a number of artists (e.g., Susan Silas, Aura Rosenberg, Chrysanne Stathacos, Hunter Reynolds, et al.) to produce low, low, low-priced items. The artist, as usual, has inscribed his invariably corny, silly, and sophomoric pronouncements on a plethora of things: faux-naïve paintings, rugs, photographs, etc. And since Leibowitz/Candyass sets himself up as a kind of idiot-savant clown or court jester, the audience is deluged with a series of jokes and funny sayings that allude, in a rather sarcastically self-deprecating manner, to the artist's position as alienated outsider—a social misfit whose homosexuality functions as both salvation and curse (depending upon one's view). Leibowitz/Candyass dwells upon his sexual orientation as something that has led to both a sense of persecution (from the outside) and liberation (from inside); thus, the strongly au-

tobiographical element to this carnival evidences an attempt by the artist to come to terms with the social and sexual complexities/contradictions that have plagued him throughout his life. Leibowitz/Candyass seems to use self-mockery and sarcasm as mechanisms to catalyze a desublimation of his self-perception as an ostracized member of the human race. In this way there is an attempt made to understand how his "stigmatization" as homosexual (and, perhaps, even as artist) has produced a sense of enforced alienation from the so-called "norm"; the carnival functions as a site of catharsis where a more extended "family" of other cultural producers is brought into the deprivatized realm of Leibowitz/Candyass, where all may share in the pain, the pathos, and the pleasure of a general alienation from the conventional within the insular enclave of the art world. That is, the art world as a context wherein all varieties of transgression (whether social, political, sexual) are permitted, if not actively courted.

Yet it is also somewhat difficult to discriminate between what is "fictional" and what is "factual" in terms of how the artist engages in various modes of self-representation. Perhaps it is an irrelevant distinction, since the distinction between Leibowitz and the clown character of Candyass appears now impossible to determine; theater and life have merged to the point of indistinguishability. The artist counts on the audience finding his faux-naïve utterances, such as "I Love Keith Haring," "I Love Gerhard Richter," "A Dick in the Mouth is worth 2 in the butt," "Gay Art," and "Happy Birthday Loser" not only amusing, but trenchantly critical. Beyond the entertainment value afforded by this

self-consciously silly confessional visual and verbal language, it is unclear whether our encounter for the Leibowitz/Candyass person/character translates into anything more substantial in terms of social, psychological, or sexual conditions that might operate as a subtext in this carnivalesque situation.

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