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Art in Review

Gifts Go in One Direction

Apexart
291 Church Street, at Walker Street,
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Through Aug. 12

With art selling so briskly these days, isn't it time for the art world to hand out some gift bags? After all, artists, as members of an intensively networked and mutually supportive community, have been giving each other gifts, which is the subject of this charming summer show.

Organized by the Toronto writer Alexander Nagel, it takes the form of a round robin of generosity, with art-

ists on both the giving and receiving end. Some gifts are in the spirit of professional courtesies: a drawing that Richard Phillips gave to the artist team of Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin was a souvenir of a collaboration. Most, though, are responses to personal occasions, or the product of whim.

Harrell Fletcher gave a photograph to Lisa Sigal and Byron Kim as a token of thanks for hospitality. Ms. Sigal gave a toy that she had made to Paul Ramirez Jonas because it reminded her of his work. Mr. Ramirez Jonas gave Amy Sillman a mixed-media assemblage as a memorial for a beloved pet. Ms. Sillman reciprocated with a hand-drawn book for Mr. Ramirez Jonas's 40th birthday. Bringing the show full circle, Jutta Koether did an abstract portrait drawing of Mr. Phillips and gave it to him just because she felt like it.

How do these goodies stack up, art-wise? Ms. Sillman puts her handmade birthday book in a "not art" category, apart from the paintings she shows in galleries. Less definitively, Ms. Koether says her portrait drawing was part of a series done as private meditational exercises and never meant for exhibition, which doesn't mean it's not art.

Mr. Ramirez Jonas's memorial piece didn't start out as art but led to a body of work that is art. Mr. Fletcher — the least conventional figure here and himself a gift to contemporary art — might say that art lies in the giving and receiving itself, not in the object. I'd say he's right, and I give him, along with the rest of his colleagues in this show, two thumbs way up.

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