

October 1, 2004

ART IN REVIEW; 'No Return'

By HOLLAND COTTER

Momenta Art 72 Berry Street Williamsburg, Brooklyn Through Oct. 18

It's about money, stupid. That's how cynics, who are sometimes realists, might view world politics these days. They might also see contemporary art that way, though at least some of that art is specifically about the politics of money. Such is the case with the work in this shrewd group show, organized by the Momenta's director, Eric Heist.

Where some artists make money from art, Jed Ela makes art from money, literally. He weaves baskets from \$1 bills, sells them for the dollar amounts used and asks his buyers not to resell at a markup. Lan Tuazon prints her own currency, and requires a written promise from its recipients to distribute it further, thus turning art into a private exercise in growth capital. Peggy Diggs adds a bit of warmth to hard, cold cash. She stamps bills with conscience-probing one-line questions -- "When did you last choose ethics over money?" reads one -- before putting them back into circulation.

Circulation is the show's larger theme. This year, the conceptual artist Rainer Ganahl mailed 100 standard New York City souvenir postcards -- many of them memorials to the World Trade Center -- to the gallery. For each, he made fake postage stamps with politically loaded inscriptions: "Axis of Evil," "Shock and Awe," "Al Qaeda." Most of the cards made it through the mail, suggesting either that we live in a nation free of censorship or that no one is paying attention.

Circulation applies as well to the news media. In a set of labor-intensive collages, Rutherford Chang scrambles words and images from The New York Times, turning the contents into abstraction. Smart, delicate and ingenious, his work is a find. Pawel Wojtasik, however, delivers the final word on the absolute value of news, money, politics and just about everything else. His short film "Dark Sun Squeeze" documents, close up, the workings of a sewage treatment plant as it processes human waste. Filtered through technology and art, excrement gleams and shines. HOLLAND COTTER