



THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

“LOOKING BACK: THE FIFTH WHITE COLUMNS ANNUAL”

In five short years, this exhibition, in which the nonprofit invites a guest to survey the best of the art scene, has become an institution—a bantamweight Whitney Biennial. Wrapping up 2010 is the veteran indie critic and curator Bob Nickas, who spent the late aughts writing a big, must-read book about abstract painting. This astutely installed selection of sixty-two works (which never feels overcrowded) includes some knockouts on canvas by Chris Vassell, Dan Walsh, and Freddie Brice, but also strays far and wide from the precincts of brushwork. Standouts include a pair of small black-and-white photographs by the ever-inscrutable, ever-mesmerizing Trisha Donnelly, a bizarre concrete sculpture by Justin Matherly, and a massive, folkloric woodcut by Gert and Uwe Tobias. Sex is one sub-theme, as seen in the raw photographs of rough trade by Alvin Baltrop and David Hurles; death is another, captured with gothic panache by Philip Taaffe in a painting on paper in which skulls emerge from a decorative pattern like vanitas smoke signals. Through Jan. 29.