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ART & DESIGN | ART IN REVIEW

‘Bad Faith’

By KAREN ROSENBERG, Aug. 25, 2016

James Fuentes

55 Delancey Street

Lower East Side

Through Sept. 11

The late-season summer exhibition “Bad Faith” revisits some acerbic works from the Reagan era (give or take a year or two), with a wary eye on this year’s election.

With just four artists, and a total of seven pieces, the show’s organizers, Andrew J. Greene and James Michael Shaeffer, manage to evoke some of that period’s complexities and its multifarious discontents.

On one wall Jessica Diamond’s huge text painting “No Money Down” (1986/2016) urges viewers to “Buy a House With 200 Credit Cards,” connecting the shady real-estate practices of the mid-80s

(when Ms. Diamond first used this slogan) to the more recent mortgage crisis. Set across from her piece is an intricate 1986 drawing on a slab of lead by Robert Morris, an elegy to the architect and SoHo loft designer Alan Buchsbaum, who died that year from AIDS-related respiratory disease (hinted at in the delicate bronchial passages of the main image).

Elsewhere, geometric abstraction meets extreme figuration; a 1982 painting by Peter Halley uses cells and conduits to elucidate networks of power, surveillance and cruelty à la Foucault, while Nayland Blake deploys a marionette and a miniature theater inspired by the writings of the Marquis de Sade (in works from 1991-94 that provide some literary-historical context for the National Endowment for the Arts culture wars of that time).

Politically minded artists today have many other tools at their disposal (witness Hank Willis Thomas and Eric Gottesman’s super PAC, For Freedoms, which raises funds for national advertising campaigns based on artworks with diverse messages), but as “Bad Faith” reminds us, there’s still a lot that can be done with painting and sculpture.

