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## Columbia Graduates, Bees Collaborate in Art Show

By Diana Greenwald

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Collaborative works often beg questions like “Who is the real artist here?” or “What is an artist?” But these were not my thoughts while looking at the pieces on display at “Reverse Turning Tests” at the Lower East Side gallery Eleven Rivington.

The artists featured in the show, Hilary Berseth, CC '01, and Kevin Zucker, School of the Arts '02, are undeniably artists, but, for this exhibition, they both played a role closer to that of an architect—planning and organizing the contributions of others to create a whole cohesive work. The most intriguing element of the show was the interaction between the aesthetically rigid and meticulously planned contributions of Berseth and Zucker and the theoretically unpredictable and variable inputs of their collaborators.

Zucker created five large-scale paintings of, as the gallery’s Web site calls them, “empty generic shelving units,” and then approached various artists to create works to “fill” the shelves. He assigned a specific theme to each shelf to inspire the artists, photographed the work each artist created as a response to the theme, and then used an inkjet printer to place images in a way that suggests the pieces are resting on the shelf. The result is something that looks like a very cool and quirky storage space—like a shelf from the fifth dimension.

Zucker’s contributions to the paintings evoke plans on an engineer’s drawing board. Blue or red silk-screened grids, which look suspiciously like something out of a Calc III textbook, cover the work and converge at an unseen vanishing point in the background. His “generic shelving units,” though, are covered with a chaotic spectrum of objects. For example, one shelf, whose theme is The Sixth Platonic Solid, features pieces ranging from what appears to be a marble sculpture of Karl Rove’s head to an ethereal green sphere. The placement of these disparate objects in Zucker’s grid system creates an intriguing tension between the controlled and the largely uncontrollable.

Berseth’s work deals with a similar tension. But while Zucker collaborated with other artists, Berseth chose to join forces with nature. He creates sculptures by building a kind of scaffolding (usually made mostly of wire) and allowing natural processes to complete the work. Berseth has four works on display at Eleven Rivington—two honeycomb sculptures and two pieces made with crystallized copper deposits. The copper sculptures give the viewer a glimpse of the highly specific underlayer that is the basis of Berseth’s sculptures, but the honeycomb sculptures are definitely, for lack of a better word, cooler.

Working with a professional beekeeper in Pennsylvania, Berseth placed scaffolding into hive supers (the big white boxes that hold bee hives) and allowed the bees to build a honeycomb on it. The result is a collection of honeycombs in shapes that would be hard to create with even conventional sculpting materials. Programmed Hive #8 is a large cube made by a complex pattern of interlocking x-shaped units, while Programmed Hive #7 can only be described as a swirling cone. The works are whimsical and intriguing and are made all the more interesting by the fact that they are bee-made.

Berseth was able to manipulate an organic natural process—the bees' ability and need to form hives—to fit his artistic needs. He harnessed the natural construction talents of insects to create a sculpture that is unique and that represents a successful blending of the measured and the theoretically immeasurable. His innovation has created a fascinating union between the natural and the man-made, the organic and the artificial.

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