

Dudley Zopp at Galerie Hertz

by Bruce Nixon

The challenge — the literal challenge — of determining content and meaning in a work of art is almost always present, but rarely is the matter stated as bluntly as it is in Dudley Zopp's "Bog." An installation piece, the work is comprised of dozens of signs, each about the size of a shirt cardboard, mounted at waist height on slender shafts and crowded into a cramped, dimly lit space deep in the interior at Galerie Hertz. Each board is covered with layers of writing on transparent paper, in this case from Hindu texts, a combination of calligraphy and painting. The gallery is in an old commercial building, so you must either search out the piece or simply stumble upon it. And when you do find it, you cannot even study it closely; the signs present an impenetrable cluster, like anxious supplicants humbled by the scarred, dusty walls that tower over them.

Based on this description alone, one might assume that "Bog" concerns itself with signage, containment, the obscurity of language, and the impossibility of a common cultural language, the work of art as repository of an already dead or obsolete language, the artwork as a storehouse of cultural ideals, the difficulty of complete reading or even of a complete narrative — any number of similarly fashionable subjects among installation artists everywhere.

But, no. The accompanying wall text informs us that the work is about the bogs that Zopp discovered after moving from Lexington to the coast of Maine: the dense, mysterious plains, and especially the "bog people," the preserved corpses that have been found there. Thus does this intriguing little exhibition fall upon our imaginations with a resounding thud. No viewer, one suspects, could have come up with that on their own. Still, experience teaches us to be skeptical of artists' interpretations of their own work. (By extension, any interpretation may be regarded as provisional, a question rather than an answer. Thus we seek out those who ask the best questions rather than those who pretend to have answers.) With this in mind, bypass the text and take pleasure in an ingenious, atmospheric exhibition.

Through Dec. 4 at Galerie Hertz, 327 E. Market St. Hours are Wednesday- Saturday, 11am-6pm. The exhibition also features assemblage pieces by Brad Devlin that combine industrial materials with an easy, ingratiating wit.