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"AS WE WERE SAYING"

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View of the exhibition "As We Were Saying," showing (foreground) Josh Kline's *Cost of Living (Aleyda)*, 2014, and (on wall) Josh Faught's *It Takes a Lifetime to Get Exactly Where You Are*, 2012; at Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space.

Meticulously curated by Claire Barliant, "[As We Were Saying \(https://www.artnews.com/t/as-we-were-saying/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/as-we-were-saying/): Art and Identity in the Age of 'Post'" dealt with the legacy of identity-based practices within a cultural climate defined, in art historian and critic Jonathan Crary's estimation, by the encroachment of "a new blandness." Bringing together artists working in an array of mediums around issues of race, class, sexuality and gender, the show sought to explore the question of whether "identity politics" and "difference" still matter.

With the exhibition arriving on the heels of Kara Walker's much-discussed *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*—a gigantic sugar-encrusted mammy caricature posed as a sphinx inside Brooklyn's Domino Sugar factory—and with the unrest following the police shooting of an unarmed black man in Ferguson, Mo., still roiling during the show's run, this question seemed largely rhetorical. What made the exhibition intriguing, however, was that its inquiry turned up answers that were far from black and white.

In a 2008 video titled *In Complete World*, Shelly Silver poses various questions, a number of which concern the socioeconomic climate in the United States, to New Yorkers she encounters on the street. Although the answers often accord with expectations arising from markers such as an individual's skin tone, gender or manner of dress, those expectations are also repeatedly thwarted. The effect—a gradual erosion of appearance-based assumptions—might lead one to envision a more "complete world" in which outward differences are irrelevant. At the same time, respondents who seem content with the status quo make it abundantly clear that such a world is a faraway dream. Created just prior to Obama's election, the work registers both the hopefulness of the moment and a stasis that many would argue has defined the years since.

Cassandra Guan's "Women's Times" (2014) is a series of cyanotypes depicting items related to second-wave feminism. The wall-mounted archive includes prints of photographs, of book covers bearing the names of such authors as Marge Piercy and Naomi Mitchison, and of newspaper clippings and other ephemera. Guan presumably chose the cyanotype process as an homage to Anna Atkins, who explored the creative potential of the medium (originally intended for diagrams and blueprints) and has often been regarded as the first female photographer. The nostalgia-generating cyan hue of the prints makes the struggles they allude to seem a relic of the past. Yet images like that of a crudely drawn board-game titled "The Abortion Game," which features a Monopoly-style layout and instructions such as "go for a sonogram (pay \$35 extra)," seem perfectly relevant today, in light of ongoing threats to women's reproductive rights.

Other noteworthy works included a wall-size textile by Josh Faught incorporating a re-created segment of the AIDS memorial quilt and a work by Josh Kline in which a series of 3D-printed body parts and cleaning implements are displayed on three janitor carts. The latter work, *Cost of Living (Aleyda)*, 2014, feels like a particularly timely commentary on the plight of working-class

Americans following the recent strike by airport janitors, whose physical and socioeconomic precariousness was brought into the public spotlight by the Ebola crisis.

Among the several public events staged as part of the exhibition was the latest iteration of Jen Kennedy and Liz Linden’s ongoing *New York* (<https://www.artnews.com/t/new-york/>) *Times Feminist Reading Group*, which invites participants to join the artists in analyzing the newspaper from a feminist perspective. As Barliant observes in the exhibition brochure, this event was among the few outright polemical works in a show otherwise populated by more ambiguous and—compared to Kara Walker’s monumental installation—decidedly subtle investigations into present-day questions of identity.



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