

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Wednesday, November 27, 2013

Jaime Davidovich

CHURNER AND CHURNER
205 Tenth Avenue
November 7–December 21

Cable first came to SoHo in 1976—by 1979 Jaime Davidovich had created *The Live! Show* as its avant-garde antidote, or “the television of the future” as the artist describes it. “Yeah I’d like to see art on television,” says a woman in one of his on-the-street interviews. “I have a color TV set, so I can see the color.” At first glance, Davidovich’s mix of cheeky art lessons, artist interviews, and news reports did pioneer art on television, but the body of work as presented in this exhibition foreshadows a deeper, more permanent meshing of art and audience.

The title bills this historic institutional critique as a museum within a gallery, which could seem like cheaply earned irony, but it’s a compelling premise given that the exhibition resembles a museum about as much as *The Live! Show* did an actual variety show. A small installation called *Museum of Television Culture*, 1982, greets viewers with a shelf of “videokitsch” souvenirs such as tiny plastic televisions and “TV Sharpeners” that Davidovich actually sold during a home-shopping segment. But the bulk of the exhibition plays out on four monitors, with one playing full episodes of *The Live! Show* while the other three highlight segments from the show: “Art Lessons” instructed by Davidovich, “The Gap,” in which Davidovich asks California mall-goers about the future of art and television, and “Portrait of Best Artist.” The latter is a 1982 interview with Davidovich and a humorously delusional artist who tagged a SoHo building proclaiming, “I AM THE BEST ARTIST.” It would be an easy joke for Davidovich if not for some surprisingly profound moments. “Some people believe that everything is art,” says the “best artist” in a bored tone, “but I believe that nothing is art.”

In “Art Lessons,” Davidovich dresses up in clichéd “artist” clothing, a barrette included, hocking lessons the way one might sell stain remover. “You don’t have any problems,” he coos as he shades the Kewpie eyes of what becomes a pleasant-looking puppy dog. “Nice and easy.” We’re reminded that Davidovich’s eerily premonitory methods of disseminating his work made art “nice and easy” to consume for the masses, without actually making concessions to them. It’s an art lesson that feels especially pertinent.

— Ali Pechman



Jaime Davidovich, *Museum of Television Culture*, 1982, collection of television memorabilia, 72 x 24 x 12”.