



Art in America

REVIEWS MAR. 29, 2013

Trisha Baga

NEW YORK,
at Whitney Museum and Greene Naftali

by Cecilia Dougherty

Trisha Baga's engaging installation at the Whitney Museum's Lobby Gallery, *Plymouth Rock 2* (2011), combined video and a number of small floor-scattered objects. These seemed as if they had been ejected from the main visual event, a large wall projection. This video was a nonlinear essay on the history of the Rock and local tourism, with subtexts on immigration and the sea itself. The installation reconfigured and extended an earlier exhibition, "Rock," which appeared at London's Vilma Gold Gallery in spring 2012.

Among the objects were a roll of paper towels, foam-core assemblages, a sideways photo of Britney Spears, a plastic water bottle and a boom box, some of them detritus left over from the piece's construction. Their seemingly random arrangement belied what was in fact a tightly ordered space marked by a careful attention to minute details of assembly. The second video, projected from the floor at the back of the gallery, threw out a spectrum of colored shapes that overlapped the main projection, and fell on the objects and incidental items such as the security camera overhead.

Hanging on the wall where the main video was projected were two small paintings, a flyer for a Chinese restaurant and a small rice paper window shade that became focal

points where the two videos occasionally met and played off one another. Light and silhouette, video geometrics and narrative interacted with viewers and objects to blur distinctions between abstraction and representation. Baga demonstrates a clever economy of means, but she also elicits an experience of the uncanny in her particular blend of the ordinary and playful. Seemingly accidental, improvisational occurrences imbued the most common items with a sense of mystery.

Florida-born, Baga has a background in sculpture and performance as well as video. Within several years of receiving her MFA from Bard in 2010, she is becoming known for an immersive process of assemblage, painting and shadow play, and a skillful use of electronic image compositing. However, the narrative loop of *Plymouth Rock 2* does not entirely fulfill its potential of coming to terms with the history referenced. American culture is presented as the debris of a routinely unexamined societal consciousness, and the focus on the incidental failed to open a discussion beyond the delicate pathos on display.

Baga's concurrent one-person show at Greene Naftali in Chelsea consisted of five works in which she used many of the same installation techniques. It was more ambitious than the Whitney show in scale and scope, but the work felt crowded. In *The Story of Painting* (2012), BBC art commentator Sister Wendy discusses in voiceover the history of painting while 3D electronic squiggles and color fields float across the artworks inventoried, in a challenge to the history of art as one of masterpieces. Baga's commentaries on both high and low art are astute, but she can too simply rely on ironic juxtaposition to highlight the gap between the two without offering any particularly new perspectives.

Meanwhile, the modest six-minute, single-channel piece *Studio Photos 2012*, projected at floor level in the farthest corner of Greene Naftali, offered clues to Baga's practice. It documents her studio process, showing how random objects influence her methodology, and revealing that synchronicity and unself-conscious invention form the resolute basis of her work.

Photo: View of Trisha Baga's Bag's Circle, 2012, video installation with acrylic paintings, foam sculptures and mixed mediums; at Greene Naftali.