

save for two of his fingers, which he had painted gold and dangled through an aperture in the wall suggesting action through a glory hole. The structure stayed in place for the duration of the exhibition, encouraging visitors to imagine the various ways this now-unoccupied set might have been or could be put to use.

But perhaps what most unifies Adams's varied works is the way in which they hint at the manipulability of social codes. Another wall-based piece, *The Lesson*, 2006, employs wooden alphabet blocks to spell out a message about the loss of innocence, claiming that, as a man, the artist must "put away all childish things." The fact that he uses the communication tools of childhood to move into adulthood speaks eloquently of the power of ritual both to reinforce and to undermine traditional social and political structures.

—Gregory Williams

## NEW ORLEANS

### Aaron McNamee HERIARD-CIMINO GALLERY

Following Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill, and a murder epidemic described by the city's mayor as nothing less than "unnatural," New Orleans lays claim to another tragedy—one that has been afforded comparatively little national attention. In late May, it was announced that the *Times-Picayune*, the region's venerable newspaper, would be reduced to a thrice-weekly print run. The stunning cutback has earned New Orleans a new ignominy: It will be the largest American city without a daily paper. Among the countless readers whom this impacts is Aaron McNamee, a New Orleans-based artist who used the *Times-Picayune* as the foundation of his 2009–12 series that bears the paper's name—his most prominent body of work to date. To make each piece, McNamee glues together a complete year's worth of the daily's pages, ordered chronologically. The most recent version took form as twelve long, planklike chunks (one for each month), which McNamee leaned McCracken-like, against the gallery wall. In this state, news-time fossilizes; information is trapped within layers of information, capped with an outer skin of newsprint whose content is almost totally effaced by a sanding process to which McNamee subjects the surface of each plank. Images are blurred into wooly puddles of color, headlines into incoherent verbiage.

Though McNamee's engagement with the *Times-Picayune* may have to end this year, he works with multiple other serial publications, often utilizing decades-old issues—full years of *Arizona Highways* say, or an

annual run of comics. Some resultant works were sculptural—*Complete Year The American Rifleman* (January 1977–December 1977), 2012, looms like a hulking, upside-down time card rack—others primarily read as two-dimensional, though all were perhaps most interesting for the ways in which they used pictorial space. For example, *Complete Year The Mother Earth News* (January 1977–December 1977), 2012, having been molded by the artist's back steps, is Z-shaped. And yet it wasn't the abstraction of the source object's original orthogonal dimensions that was so compelling, but that of the magazine's pictorial content. With the journal's images transformed into psychedelic pastel blobs by McNamee's surface treatment, informational content was reduced to a fittingly tranquil palette. If this work and *Complete Year Smithsonian* (January 1977–December 1977), 2012, reveled in calligraphic fussiness, the pieces made from '90s comics—more melted Peter Saul than restrained late Pollock—sparkled with a garish visuality. An autobiographical impulse governs McNamee's selections of materials. The *Times-Picayune* pieces, corresponding with the artist's soon-to-be-lapsed daily ritual of reading the newspaper, channel mature adulthood, while 1977, the year of several source publications used in this exhibition, is also the year McNamee was born. The works made with comic book pages from the 1990s can be read as correlating to the artist's adolescence.

McNamee flirts a bit with slickness; the traces of labor can disappear in his flawlessly elegant objects to the point that some could pass as factory-made. But, as with McCracken or Peter Alexander—other sculptors whose work was both austere and somewhat brassy—meticulous handicraft produces a prepackaged look. McNamee's work avoids careening into the hackneyed territory of the personal time capsule in that it principally functions in the present as a meditation both on the declining print industry and the concomitant loss of our tactile relationship to reading materials, and on notions of production and "finish" in relation to the contemporary art object. There's something of a Nauman-pacing-the-studio, Tehching-Hsieh-punching-the-time-clock asceticism to McNamee's art. He fetishizes the tedium of routine, and from a daily paper or monthly glossy teases out an eroticism of the everyday.

—Nick Stillman

## LITTLE WOLF, WI

### Gretchen Bender THE POOR FARM

Seeing video art as "ghettoized [by] the eighties art world," Gretchen Bender (1951–2004) described herself not as a video artist, but as a visual artist working with television as her material. It is in part because of this wary definition of her practice—one rooted in a commitment to art's "public vision"—that Bender's work remains so important today. Thanks to curator Philip Vanderhyden, a survey of the artist's commercial output and two of her central installations from the 1980s can be experienced firsthand in "Tracking the Thrill," an exhibition of Bender's videos on view this year at Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam's experimental art space in rural Wisconsin.

The highlight of this exhibition, and the work that best exemplifies Bender's famed notion of "electronic theater," is *Total Recall*, 1987—a striking eight-channel installation in a black-box setting of twenty-four TV monitors and two rear-projection screens. In this 2012 iteration, the piece is shown on DVD and projected video, a contemporary translation of the magnetic tape and film used for the work's 1987 debut at the Kitchen in New York. While Bender's original mixture of formats was critical to her conception of the piece, the artist was interested in



Aaron McNamee,  
*Complete Year  
Times-Picayune*  
(August 3, 2010–  
August 2, 2011),  
2011, newspaper,  
glue, twelve panels,  
each 66 x 9 x 1½".  
From the series  
"Complete Year  
*Times-Picayune*,"  
2009–12.