

ART PAPERS

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

By David Hall

Jonesboro, Arkansas artist John Salvest met **KIM LEVIN**, art critic and longtime writer of the weekly exhibition listings for *The Village Voice*, when she was guest curator for "Max: 98" at the University of Memphis. One of the critical favorites of the exhibition that Levin delivered was Salvest's *Meditation 7:21*, a mosaic of countless business cards of every color and variety enveloping several of the gallery's steep walls. Perched above the room, the aggregate of business cards formed a colossal banner whose scale and sentiment suggested biblical poignancy: "Soon you will have forgotten the world and soon the world will have forgotten you."

"Itineraries" (*Marshall Arts, October 17—November 22, 2003*) represents a turning of the tables. Salvest is the curator this time around, bringing to light scribbled notes, sketches, postcards and other literature accumulated by Levin during more than a decade of covering the New York art scene. While visiting the city several years ago, Levin invited Salvest to tag along on her rounds, where he first observed her idiosyncratic lists and jottings, tiny

road maps drawn on Post-It notes and the like. "Incurably predisposed as I am toward the obsessive and systematic," Salvest confesses in the curator's statement, "I found these little documents irresistible. But more than that, I felt as though I had stumbled upon an archive of remarkable interest."

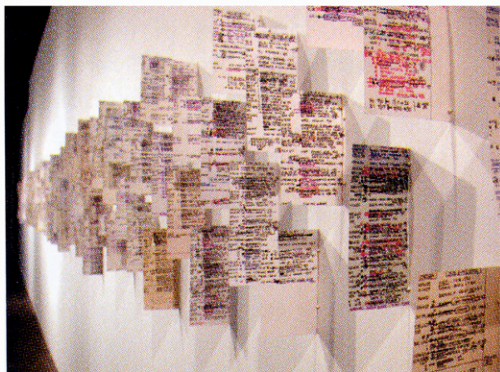
Upon entering the cavernous gallery, one is awestruck at the prodigious volume of materials, notwithstanding that the exhibition employs only a fraction of the archive. The documents are grouped for display according to their particular function or defining characteristic, although Levin's mechanism relies upon the interdependence of the entire coterie. The meticulously detailed lists assume a symbolic potency when seen en masse, as do the rows and rows of besmudged mailings and brochures of *Notes I* and *Cards*. Here, it is evident that field observations and illustrative reminders are scrawled on whatever printed matter is handy, which steadily accumulates. There is even a collection devoted to oddballs, *Notes II*, a row of artifacts that are trapezoidal, full of holes or otherwise do not follow any standard size or shape.

Lists I exhibits hundreds of weekly travel itineraries chronologically, each following a standard weekly travel itineraries chronologically, each following a standard

format prioritized by destination and other categories. The very need for such a device to manage the outings indicates the utter magnitude of the New York exhibition circuit and the awesome task Levin has in representing it. Entries are color-coded, numbered, scratched through or circled, a method seemingly refined over the course of time for maximum efficiency. Salvest uses a non-nonsense technique to suspend each itinerary along its feathered edge and then staggers the lot of them along the wall rhythmically so that both sides are easily viewed. Thanks to the imaginative installation, the cumulative impact is visceral rather than merely documentary, amplified by all those columns jumping off the wall.

But it also looks mighty familiar. Salvest the artist has long been recognized as a packrat—salvaging, cataloging and recapitulating the simplest of objects: nail clippings, spent coffee filters, cigarette butts, business cards; you name it. He always finds his lyrical pearl within the commonplace. The serial objects in this case are Levin's, but they too convey very authentically life's lowly routines, its beauty, banality and ultimate transience.

The fact is, Salvest is written all over "Itineraries" both conceptually and aesthetically, so much so that one wonders why he doesn't share equal billing with Levin.



Kim Levin, *Lists I*, 2003, installation, 54 by 4 feet (David Hall, photo).