

ARTFORUM

“Sweet Distemper”

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

615 West 27th Street

July 11–August 16

The collectively violent and aggressive gestures against art's traditional forms of display in this group show enkindle the works' anarchistic commonality. Curated by Isaac Lyles, “Sweet Distemper” exhibits five artists who burn, shatter, erase, scribble, and nail their contributions into two of the gallery's three rooms. Among the notable works is Davina Semo's *YOU SAID WE'RE SKIPPING THE PRELUDE; START THE INSULTS*, 2011, which is composed of three contiguous concrete and smashed glass squares on the floor—a desecrated triptych of industrial refuse. On an adjacent wall, Anna Betbeze's charcoal-on-wool *Smoke*, 2012, consists of a flokati rug that has been visibly tortured by fire: Holes and black markings offer permanent scars from its physical abuse, giving new meaning to carpet burn.

Despina Stokou's mixed-media paintings and installations are perhaps the most successful works on view, as they address the various constituents of the *milieu artistique*. The Berlin-based artist scratched a tongue-in-cheek letter of appeal titled *Dear Gallery*, 2012, onto a central column, urging the gallery to effectively perform its promotional function (the message begins PLEASE DON'T FUCK THIS UP FOR ME). Here, Stokou mocks the hierarchical and authoritarian structures of the art market while also profaning the immaculate white walls on which her work is rendered. Nailed to the same column, Semo's hanging steel chains, *THE BOTTOM WAS FURTHER DOWN THAN I THOUGHT*, 2010, evoke the bondages of codependency between artist and institution. By inviting this contentious group to debase the space, the gallery has volunteered itself for a cohesive yet commoditized roast that nevertheless proves advantageous for both parties.



View of “Sweet Distemper,” 2012.