

FRIDAY, JULY 30, 2004

Dominic McGill

*Derek Eller Gallery
526-30 West 25th Street, Chelsea
Through Aug. 6*

Zillions of drawings have passed through art galleries this season, and Dominic McGill adds yet another, though this one is different. Titled "A Project for a New American Century," it is uncommonly large: 65 feet long and 8 feet tall. It twists around like a labyrinth in Eller's small gallery. And its subject is epic: late-20th century history, a labyrinthine and twisted subject.

Mr. McGill, who was born in England and lives in New York, lays out that history, beginning with the bombing of Hiroshima, in a data-stream of words and images, with words predominating. Arranged as a kind of free-associational timeline, the names of hundreds of people, places and events, written in dozens of lettering styles, swarm over the mural-size surface, mingled with news headlines and slogans. Sid Vicious, Freedom Summer, Patrice Lumumba, Chernobyl, John F. Kennedy, Jonestown Massacre, By Any Means Necessary, Axis of Evil and Summer of Love are only a few of the most recognizable entries that pop out from thousands of others you barely remember you knew until you see them.

Mr. McGill's erudite chronicle does more than line up facts. It knits them together so that cause-and-effect relationships between historical developments across the world become clear. And it does so in ingenious visual terms, by varying the size, style and weight of the handwritten text so that the story is delivered in countless intersecting and overlapping layers. The drawing, whose title is a slight variation on the name of a neoconservative, Washington-based think-tank, ends in the present, with an image of a pathless forest where words disappear. Is it the beginning of a new Dark Age or the edge of a new frontier? Artists like Mr. McGill will tell us.

HOLLAND COTTER