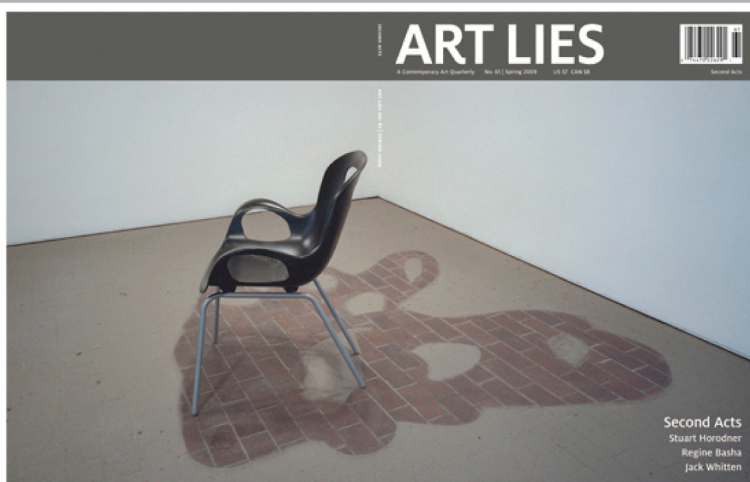




Spring 2009



Douglas Weathersby, ICA Installation Project; installation view, 2003; photograph; 14 x 11 inches



Douglas Weathersby, ES Inaugural Retrospective and Storage Loft, 2009; installation

Douglas Weathersby is not a neat freak, but his day job might suggest otherwise. For years, his artmaking process has been inextricably linked to his one-man professional cleaning services/performance/conceptual art hybrid, Environmental Services. For his first retrospective, ES Inaugural Retrospective and Storage Loft, surveying work made in the last fourteen years, Weathersby converted Judi Rotenberg's Newbury Street gallery into a site-specific storage unit, complete with transplanted debris, dirt-filled dustpans, a makeshift office and a large, wall-sized photocollage-on-vinyl installation of each and every ES invoice since its inception in 2002.

Though somewhat disorienting (brooms standing against the vinyl wall appear to be in the photo instead of resting on it), the space is inviting and warm—like a cave crafted from found objects and two-by-fours—entirely composed of collected artifacts from ES projects over the years. A wooden shelf features several small objects, including a jar of mop water from gallerist Barbara Krakow's house and a bottle of perfume procured from an old ICA Artist Prize gift bag (a renowned honor in Boston, which Weathersby was awarded in 2003, now called the Foster Prize). Tiny pocket-size ziplock bags filled with dirt and detritus swept from the floor of the ICA during the Kai Althoff de-installation are each organized by material, providing a small shred of order in a setting that is designed to seem outwardly random.

Photos of completed ES projects on the gallery's north wall, impeccably lit and gorgeous in their own right, serve as images of the artist's visual aesthetic rather than photographic documentation of his work. Across the room, a pair of white museum gloves placed next to a stack of photos encourages viewers to physically handle the prints—a method that is surprisingly fitting, given the frequency and context in which the artist uses his own hands. The photos depict filthy settings like warehouse basements and dirty sunlit rooms, which are impeccably cleaned and scrubbed, with the exception of shadows of mundane objects like chairs or ladders, which are left behind on the floor in the form of dust. Other images reverse this process, shadows appearing as the only clean surfaces in the frame. The second floor "attic" space of his installation serves as both a mini-museum and glorified storage space, housing old works and commonplace industrial items like extension cords and window cleaner. Among the debris is a work on paper found on a floorboard, featuring the imprint of hundreds of individual staples collected from a tack board at Mass Art.

Weathersby's techniques are carried out with surgical precision, subverting function in favor of aesthetics with almost nothing left to chance. His practice is just as much about accumulation as it is about reduction, and this survey of his work is more of an ode to an artmaking process than a giant nostalgic amalgam of stuff, making an installation of this character and scale deeply appropriate.

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