

Ronald Bladen made memorable art from very simple forms. At the same time, its poetic curves can be seen as a recognition of New York School painting—as Clement’s small drawings, also shown, pointed out. It becomes clear that Clement, who has his studio in Brooklyn, is very much a New York artist. The title, *Oiler*, references the materials used and the machinery needed to make the sculpture; gallery notes indicate that Clement’s interests tend toward the industrial, both in methods and materials. This is evident even in his

small sculptures are clearly indoor pieces. Works like *Freckle* (2010), a welded tubular steel sculpture, are somewhere in between. Compositionally *Freckle* is complex, consisting of a loop that circles more than once while leaving a large, disk-shaped space open in the middle. A curved piece about seven feet long is attached to one of the circular pipes, adding interest to the expressive form. Painted fire-engine red, *Freckle* possesses an engaging accessibility, something true for all of Clement’s work, even *Oiler*.

whose historical concerns have been transformed by his own creativity.

—Jonathan Goodman

#### NEW YORK

#### Betye Saar

#### Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

Betye Saar spent four years preparing for this exhibition—not a small effort, considering that she is 84 years old. The result was an impressive installation, and it demonstrated that Saar continues to be a creative and critical voice to be reckoned

the 1930s of African, Native American, and Irish descent, she has experienced firsthand the difficulties of exclusion. Her ongoing dedication to their visualization proves her ambition to create works that can function as a voice for those who suffer(ed), as well as aid in educating and sensitizing younger generations.

While Saar’s works can translate as outcries of protest, they avoid specificity. Her vocabulary is more poetic than explicit. Instead of offering didactics, she aims to establish general moods of aggression, frustration, and claustrophobia, for example, which encourage viewers to seek their own narratives. The cages evoke a clear sense of anxiety, but they do not pinpoint concrete events; instead, they reflect ongoing problems such as racial discrimination. While Saar gathered objects from the past, she was careful to provide a timeless context. Contemplated individually, her sculptures not only spark memories, they also inquire into present fears and hopes for the future. One wonders what is really confined here. Is it history, persistent stereotypes, or simply our thoughts? For Saar, the cage signifies physical and spiritual confinement, but it also implies resilience and survival.

Aesthetically, Saar’s work is hard to categorize, not least because of her eclectic references. Since the 1970s, she has found inspiration in African and African American ritual objects, and her works reflect a strong interest in magic, mystery, and folk legends. Saar has also been significantly influenced by Joseph Cornell, among other Modernist and Surrealist overtones. But unlike Cornell, who drew from the unconscious to transform commonplace objects into dreamscapes, Saar has always offered a distinctly socio-critical outlook. Her work might appear whimsical and delicate, but it is utterly sober in its focus on the unspeakable crimes of humanity.



**Betye Saar, installation view of “Cage: A New Series of Assemblages and Collages,” 2010.**

tabletop sculptures, which reprise the lyrical effects of *Oiler’s* grand arcs. *Bendaroo*—some of the titles originated with Clement’s kids—is quite small, but like *Oiler*, it consists of welded steel, painted a light blue, perhaps to emphasize its playfulness. It forms a close-to-perfect circle, balancing without motion on top of a small, thin steel plinth. Perhaps Clement is finally most interested in the visual projection of balance.

As a monumental work, *Oiler* should most likely be set out in the open, amid pedestrian traffic and public-minded appreciation. The

The similarly sized *Tiller* (2007) takes on proportions slightly larger than those of the human body. A large, looping pipe supports a curved segment and a straight tube. At once epically massive and lyrically inspired, the orange-painted *Tiller* shows us that space remains open, in both a literal and figurative sense, for work that takes a certain historical moment—New York, a couple of generations ago—as its guide. Clement’s masters, stylistically speaking, may no longer be active or may be near the close of their careers, but their voices stay alive in his work. Clement’s sculpture is perhaps best understood as an inspired continuation of New York’s sculptural traditions, but one

with. In addition to several collages, the show featured 20 of Saar’s signature mixed-media assemblages, all involving birdcages. Collected at yard sales, flea markets, and antique shops, these finds were presented on pedestals and suspended from the ceiling. Each one contained different objects, ranging from model ships, woven braids, and artificial birds to racially degrading Aunt Jemima figurines. Within this dramatic display, formerly lifeless objects were transformed into confined protagonists, alluding to social, racial, gender-based, psychological, spiritual, economic, and historical exclusion.

Saar has worked with notions of repression and resistance for over four decades. As a woman born in



Left: Jim Campbell, *Scattered Light*, 2010. Custom electronics, LEDs, light-bulbs, wire, and steel, 80 x 20 x 16 ft. Below: John Clement, *Freckle*, 2010. Welded steel with pigment, 10 x 8 x 8 ft.

becoming part of the brain's consciousness. There is an interesting synthesis between the moving image and the lights that represent it. Arranged in a grid, the light pattern reads as a sculpture in its own right—before viewers make sense of the flickering images.

*Exploded View (Birds)* (2010) consists of a three-dimensional outlay of 1,100 LEDs hanging at intervals that allow visitors to walk through them. Viewers see birds fluttering as they take flight and land—but only when they face the lights. Within the installation, the constructed imagery falls apart, and one sees nothing more than individual lights going on and off. Here, as elsewhere, Campbell reveals himself as a magician of low-tech effects, setting up the question: How far can the resolution of the image be lowered before viewers can no longer make out what they see and can't piece the bits of information together? There are perceptual issues here that quite literally boggle the mind in their celebration of the blur as a visual norm.

Campbell has researched this problem very thoroughly. An earlier video work of a boxing match reduces the number of pixels to a

mere 88—and, even so, visually clever viewers will recognize the punching gloves rather quickly. But perhaps that isn't the point; what matters more is the ability of the blurred image to move from the abstract to the particular. The forms in *Taxi Ride to Sarah's Studio* (2010), a large wall piece consisting of LEDs, wire, and custom electronics, result from Campbell's filming street details—cars, people walking—while taking a taxi ride. The images come in and out of focus quickly as the taxi passes from highly lit to darkened areas. This memorable piece establishes the visual efficacy of moderately focused imagery.

This exhibition coincided with Campbell's major installation at New York's Madison Square Park. In *Scattered Light* (2010), thousands of LEDs hanging from steel cables were programmed to go on and off at different moments. The display created a representation of people walking based on a video of commuters striding through Grand Central Station, but again Campbell eliminated a considerable number of pixels. A conjurer of visual suggestion, he consistently offers seemingly imaginary images mediated by visual reality.

—Jonathan Goodman

## NEW YORK

### John Clement

#### Causey Contemporary

The very large, garage-like space of Causey Contemporary just barely had room for John Clement's *Oiler* (2011), which consists of two curved tubes of 20-inch-diameter welded steel that reach more than 18 feet in height. A remarkable gesture, *Oiler* gives the nod both to the mon-

umental art of Mark di Suvero—as a young man Clement apprenticed with him—and the metal arcs of the French-born, New York-based sculptor Bernar Venet. But it should be said that Clement's art is very much his own, both in its playful extravagance and its handling of form. Surprisingly, even the big works have a lightness to them; one of the most attractive aspects of *Oiler* is the seemingly weightless lyricism of its overall gestalt—this happens despite the fact that it weighs some 16,000 pounds. (Scale became a point of interest in itself: the work was so large that it had to be assembled in the gallery, which provided ear protection and hard hats so the public could watch.)

*Oiler* harkens back to a time in New York when Minimalist steel structures were popular, and artists like Richard Serra, Tony Smith, and

