



Gardar Eide Einarsson, *Burnt Black Flag*, 2005.
cotton and brass, 65 x 59".

GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON TEAM GALLERY

... and then your wages, your blankets, and your right to suck cocks won't do you any good, because we'll all drown. The absurdly extended parenthetical subtitle of an otherwise deadpan sculpture by Norwegian artist Gardar Eide Einarsson, an irregular stack of thirty-nine dark wool blankets exhibited recently at Team Gallery along with a selection of other works from the past year, hints at a distinctly provocative, possibly nihilistic worldview. The fact that the line is borrowed from *Ship of Fools*, a play written by Theodore Kaczynski, aka the Unabomber, does little to discourage this impression. Yet Einarsson's reputation as a playful political ironist, cemented by canny contributions to a string of recent group exhibitions, including "Greater New York 2005" at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center and "Strike" at Britain's Wolverhampton Art Gallery, perhaps suggests the contrary.

The blanket sculpture—which is, paradoxically, at once a hermetic dead end and an invitation to further inquiry (or, as the press release puts it, "a primary text with a footnoted reference")—might also provide the beginnings of a key to Einarsson's approach in general. Like Gareth James, with whom he collaborated on "Lars von Trier" at American Fine Arts in 2002,

Einarsson is an alumnus of the Whitney Independent Study Program, and the acutely reflexive research-based approach that the course has long fostered is present and correct in his project. Einarsson regularly employs visual and verbal texts that are characterized by a simplistic didacticism, but he invariably has a multilayered conceptual defense at the ready. For example, the outwardly iconoclastic text of one of his characteristic wall paintings, *TOTAL REVOLUTION*, is in fact derived from a 1969 work by Lee Lozano, while its dashed-off look is actually produced using a computer-designed stencil, suggesting a distinctly studied, consciously aestheticized take on the imaging of a New World Order.

"Leashed or confined," Einarsson's first US solo show, saw him continue in a similar vein. Described, tellingly, as "a show of signs," it was characterized by an austere visual elegance and a self-conscious acknowledgment of an ideological schism that might once have led to its categorization (or condemnation) as radical chic. Lacking the critical foils provided by an institutional setting or the proximity of other artists' divergent aesthetics, Einarsson's work—which here ranged over photography and painting as well as the manipulation of objects—faced a stiff test, and the impression was predictably uneven. While *Burnt Black Flag* and *Burnt White Flag*, for example, were successful in pitting theatrically heraldic form against ambiguous (cynical? celebratory?) content, *please keep all ages leashed or confined* and *the ultimate price* seemed comparatively halfhearted—suggestions of images suggesting ideas.

More promisingly, Einarsson continued to demonstrate a facility for steering his immersion in popular "subcultures" such as punk rock (including its latter-day variants) and skateboarding in some unexpected and entertaining directions. A wall painting depicting the logo of cult independent record label SST is subtitled *Sic Semper Tyrannis*, a Latin phrase meaning "thus always to tyrants" that was reportedly shouted in defiance by John Wilkes Booth immediately after he shot Abraham Lincoln and which was later reprised on a Lincoln T-shirt by Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. The knowledge that SST's initials actually stand for Solid State Transformers (the company started life as an electronics manufacturer) establishes a peculiar web of meanings in which both the actual precariousness and the potential fascination of Einarsson's practice are readily, absorbingly apparent.

—Michael Wilson