

## Best in Show

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

### Demetrius Oliver: 'Observatory'

D'Amelio Terras  
525 West 22nd Street, 212-352-9460  
Through September 27

## Strange Brew

Pickaxes rise up phallically in the middle of four-poster beds; table lamps colonize a hardwood floor like mushrooms; a lump of coal as big as a breadbasket shares a nightstand with scattered lightbulbs. After he composes these domestic conundrums, Demetrius Oliver photographs each one in the curved, tarnished metal of an old teapot; the effect is akin to an old-master interior seen through a fish-eye lens. A related series features the artist in a dark room, the lightbulbs in his hands illuminated by slide projections of his weird household tableaux—the bulbs' shapes distort the images even as they impart a palpable volume to the surrounding gloom. Give these dozens of pictures a little time and connections begin to glitter like constellations on a crisp night. A half-open packing crate casts a green glow like an irradiated coffin; the same box appears in another picture, its foam padding creating a bumpy screen for the projected image of a plunging stairwell. Ideas of perspective, space, and gravity are warped here, like the event horizon of a black hole. Any coherent narrative has been drawn into oblivion, leaving behind these tantalizingly beautiful afterimages.

### John O'Connor

O'Connor uses "haphazard research" and personal obsession (body weight, lottery numbers, weather reports) as inspiration for his drawings, some of which are almost seven feet high. This approach lends his charts and graphs a delectably organic feel, as layers of silky black graphite combine with bold colored-pencil patterns for an almost painterly heft. *A Good Idea* (2008) resembles a pollen spore armored with letters and numbers, a hybrid of data and nature. The blend of odd shapes and enigmatic information draws you in, slowing down your mind so that your eye can marvel at the lush density of the images. *Pierogi*, 177 N 9th St, Brooklyn, 718-599-2144. Through October 6.

### 'Implant'

Although the lobby gallery of Swiss financial behemoth UBS is looking a bit threadbare (fallout from the mortgage debacle?), this group show is a pleasingly bedraggled jaunt through all manner of flora and media. In a film by Swiss artist Roman Signer, a Christmas tree becomes a missile that startlingly converges light, shadow, space, and time. A 1970 video features Dennis Oppenheim using one hand to methodically compact a fern to pulp, perhaps a not-unexpected act from an artist who once said: "I've never been one to react positively to nature. I was from Brooklyn." Ann Craven's bright paintings of flowers and birds celebrate nature's garishness; William Eggleston's color photograph (ca. 1965-74) of a junked Cadillac engulfed by weeds and vines reminds us that nature will reclaim anything humanity leaves unguarded. *UBS Art Gallery, 1285 Sixth Ave, 212-713-2885. Through October 31.*

## Art

### Alicia Ross

This young artist's "Motherboard" series features appropriated Internet porn—nubile women sprawl across large cotton panels, cross-stitched in silver and gold thread with digital precision. A full-size *Love Swing* in the middle of the gallery is fabricated from yarn rather than leather, and exudes a creepy vibe furthered by numerous frilly pillows. One of these is tightly cinched with rope and delicately stitched "He loves me, he loves me knot"; another features Rockwellian silhouettes of children and the single word "Prey." Witty videos filter sex scenes through those round eye-test patterns of colored dots you might remember from grade school. Substantially more men than women are color-blind—Ross offers one way to subvert the "male gaze" amid the Internet's panopticon of voyeurism. *Black and White, 636 W 28th St, 212-244-3007. Through October 4.*



Courtesy Demetrius Oliver

### Welcome to the warp! Demetrius Oliver's *Firmament II*, 2007-2008

### Dog of the Month Andres Serrano: 'Shit'

Not since Divine gorged on poodle poop in *Pink Flamingos* has there been such hullabaloo about excrement, yet these huge color photographs of animal and human feces are the opposite of transgressive or outrageous—they're bland. It doesn't help that the notorious, ethereally beautiful *Piss Christ* is hung in a side gallery; powerful diagonals in Serrano's 1987 shot of a crucifix immersed in his own urine heighten the sense of bloody agony transmuted into luminous golden grace. Variegated browns dominate the current work, while fuzzy backgrounds of tie-dye hues emphasize the sludgy affect of the subjects. *Fly Shit* features an insect scaling a tapered piece of dung, a high-rise of pestilence; *Freudian Shit*'s compact arch of crap offers an orifice through which an orange background beckons. The wan punch lines of the titles can't overcome the general muddiness of the compositions, and although shifting focus while enlarging small objects can create an exquisite tension (think Laurie Simmons's photos of dolls in color-coordinated interiors), Serrano's transitions from blurry blobs to sharp crusts prove undramatic. This shit just ain't happenin'. *Yvon Lambert, 550 W 21st St, 212-242-3611. Through October 4.*