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**Image:** Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Rat, Real Rhinestone Rat 1* and *Real Rhinestone Rat 2*, 1960s/2017. Mixed media. Courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York

*Near & Dear*

September 15 – October 28, 2017

At EFA Project Space, 323 W. 39<sup>th</sup> St., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

**Opening reception:** Friday, September 15, 6 – 8 PM

**Artists:** Jennifer Paige Cohen, Anoka Faruqee, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Sheila Pepe, Alison Saar, Rachel Stern, William Villalongo, Brian Zegeer

**Curated by:** Carrie Moyer

EFA Project Space presents *Near & Dear*, an intergenerational exhibition which explores amorous connections artists make with signifying materials and objects. This group of eight artists use objects to deliver embodied meaning, from the haptic to the optical to cerebral. All have an investment in a specific material culture and the product of their research takes the form of discrete artifacts.

The term “material culture” tells of the relationships between people and their things, irrespective of time and place. The range of culturally specific aesthetic vernaculars employed by each artist in the exhibition serves as a starting point for *Near & Dear*. For some, the connection is intuitive. **Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt**, an artist who was an altar boy in the Catholic Church and a radical on the frontlines of the Gay Liberation Movement, treats his tin-foil chalices and reliquaries to gay porn stars with the same bedazzled tenderness.

For others, the vernacular is used to address to notions of taste, high vs low art, the domestic space vs the gallery or institution. **Rachel Stern's** stand-alone installations re-envision the Renaissance "studiolo" as dandy's lair filled with queer ruminations on life, death and decoration. For **Sheila Pepe**, crocheted textiles and brocade upholstery are combined to obliquely evoke the aspirational and assimilationist sensibilities of the Italian-American church and home. Painted on velvety black flocking, **William Villalongo's** pictures of coquettish brown nymphs combine high and low, reimagining classical mythology in the form of the maligned (and beloved) "sofa-sized" oil painting.

Elsewhere in *Near & Dear*, ideas are transmitted directly to the viewer through the imagined provenance of readymade or the hidden histories behind familiar landmarks. Battered tin, weathered wood and tag-sale ephemera ground **Alison Saar's** narratives in the rural past and Great Migration of African Americans. The panoramic structure of **Brian Zegeer's** *The Golden Hour* re-imagines a domestic interior as a place of slow, prolonged scrutiny, inspired by Persian miniature paintings and his Lebanese grandfather's wood-inlaid backgammon table.

Contemporary art may also claim its own unique material culture(s). The work of both **Jennifer Paige Cohen** and **Anoka Faruqee** incorporates some aspect of the "real world" to puncture the hermetic sign system and values of the art world. Cohen's witty, table-top plaster pieces are double-sided. From one side the forms seem to be distant cousins of Brancusi; on their backside, Cohen has embedded ordinary sweaters, as if the model's clothes peeled off in the casting of her limb. Faruqee infuses the tradition of self-referential painting with the kitschy-ness of op-art, creating discursive objects which hide their intellectual chops behind a kind of giddy pleasure.

Filled with texture and innuendo, the work included in *Near & Dear* celebrates the recognition, delight, and sheer bewilderment artists discover by mining the familiar.

## RELATED EVENTS

- **Thursday, September 21, 6:30 PM** — *Artist as Culture Producer*: Paddy Johnson, Kat Kiernen, Sharon Loudon, Carrie Moyer, and Austin Thomas in conversation
- **Wednesday, October 25, 6:30 PM** — Glenn Adamson and Sheila Pepe in Conversation: *Near & Dear*, Material Culture and Artists as Researchers

**For press inquiries, please contact Meghana Karnik, EFA Project Space Program Manager at [meghana@efanyc.org](mailto:meghana@efanyc.org) or 212-563-5855 x 229.**

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EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it, the communities that arise because of it, and to everyday life; and that by providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas.

The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA) is a 501 (c) (3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space and the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. [www.efanyc.org](http://www.efanyc.org)

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The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts



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