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by Will Heinrich

McArthur Binion



Installation view of McArthur Binion's show "Route One: Box Two" at Galerie Lelong. Credit Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

Through Dec. 23. Galerie Lelong, 528 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-315-0470; galerielelong.com.

The formal premise of McArthur Binion's "DNA Series," as demonstrated in "Route One: Box Two" at Galerie Lelong, has a well-chosen simplicity that makes it nearly inexhaustible. Starting with a board backing, he covers it with palm-size squares of personal documents or images — black and white photos of his childhood home in Macon, Miss.; white-on-black reversals of his birth certificate; or copies of his address book, which dates back to New York in the 1970s and is filled with other artists. Then he

covers every square with a 7-to-10-line grid of thick oil-stick lines, usually in a somber indigo, black or sienna, but sometimes in purple or rose.

It's a way of inserting his own identity into the enduring modernist conversation, of course, and of counterposing a humane, individual gesture to rigid bureaucratic categories. But since it's the artist's choice to bring those bureaucratic constraints into the gallery and his handmade marks that give them a reason for being there, it's also more complicated than that, and depending on how a given tile is oriented, the lines he draws over it might look like strikethroughs, underlining or chicken wire.

Sometimes he adds a large circle or oval to the pattern with selective gaps in the grids. The strongest pieces, though, are those in which he lets his basic mechanism operate without interference, but then amplifies it one more turn by putting two complementary panels side by side. In the 12-foot-wide "Transition: One," indigo on the left, applied over photos of the house, creates a magnetic buzz against red grids, over his datebook, on the right.