

# The New York Times

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## Joe Ovelman

*Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery  
504 West 22nd Street, Chelsea  
Through tomorrow*

Joe Ovelman's multimedia work is an interesting addition to a continuing and entirely unsystematic redefinition of what gay means, or can mean, in contemporary art. At the center of his show is something not so new: a salon-style suite of color photographs, mostly of young men, the sort of thing that Wolfgang Tillmans has made familiar and that a young artist like Slava Mogutin, in a show at Rare Gallery in Chelsea through May 8, pushes in specific erotic directions.

But once past the group of photographs, Mr. Ovelman's work gets odder. A small back room in the gallery is entirely covered with more photos, but all of trees taken in the Ramble section of Central Park, a well-known cruising spot. A wall in the front gallery is lined with plastic sandwich bags holding discarded condoms that the Mr. Ovelman collected in the park. And much of the rest of the show is made up of messages scrawled on yellow Post-it notes or colored drawing paper. Funny, abject, angry, they include childhood sexual fantasies, tart notes-to-self on how to handle errant lovers, and cartoons, including one of a coffin.

Mr. Ovelman uses certain tactics and materials associated with what is often thought of as AIDS art of the 1990's, and does so with an irreverent and relatively relaxed attitude. Interestingly, however, it is not entirely relaxed. His work here may feel uninhibited by a sense of immediate sexual danger, but it also suggests ambivalence about celebrating pleasure.

HOLLAND COTTER

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