

ARTFORUM

Ian Carr-Harris

SUSAN HOBBS
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Ian Carr-Harris
'église' (figure), 2009
paint, wood, Plexiglas, books, tables
dimensions variable.
From the series "Paradigm," 2002–.

A model of a church is displayed on a table in the gallery. Part of a work titled *'église' (figure)* ('church' [figure]), 2009, this carefully crafted wooden object—the latest installment in Ian Carr-Harris's ongoing "Paradigm" series of architectural replicas—performs a dutiful nod to professional standards of model-making, with glistening and evenly applied black-painted surfaces, clerestory windows, and a steeple that all may faithfully refer to a specific source (possibly of Francophone origin, given the title). But such thoughts are felt in tension with ambiguous details such as circular holes—placed roughly where a rose window might be situated—which blasphemously suggest the semantic shift from an immaculate church structure to a birdhouse awaiting feathers and fecal matter. Peering through these

little openings permits views of another church inside, rendered in ghostly white, perhaps a reference to the accumulative practice of rebuilding houses of worship after apocalyptic events or to the black-and-white rigidity of Catholic doctrinal teachings. This pedagogical context becomes slightly secularized by a book, placed alongside the model, opened to a page with a diagram of a steeple—a gesture connoting the art-historical enterprise of comparing isolated stylistic features. Placed on an adjacent table is a crate that contains all components required to assemble the model. This DIY kit implies the playful and potentially liberating process of constructing one's own church, an individualizing enterprise that applies to both children and adults, in spite of the identical or conformist appearance of the finished product.

The artist's dialogue with doctrine recurs in the upstairs gallery with the elegant work *Ten verbs/Ten commandments*, 2005, composed of ten blackboards that each depict ruled lines, a handwritten lowercase verb, and a capital letter. The meticulously rendered texts evoke the instructional settings of a classroom, although some words—including COVET, KILL, and STEAL—represent terms with transgressive resonances that would function uneasily as children's writing exercises. The accompanying capital letters may imply the process of abstraction and significant semantic change, when one shifts from the active performative of the verb (to kill) to the contemplative stasis of the noun (the kill) or perhaps to an absolute meaning (the Kill). The mental pronunciation, or actual written emulation, of Carr-Harris's wonderfully crafted linguistic images is comparable to the personal construction of a church or *the church*: While ostensibly submitting to a religious, ethical, or institutional norm, one may experience with these works a surprising amount of semantic flexibility and enrichment.

— Dan Adler

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