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What's old is new (and vice-versa)

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Uri Aran, House, installation views at Gavin Brown's enterprise New York

Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise New York/Rome. Photo: Thomas Müller.

A few days later, Gavin Brown Enterprise provided an answer of sorts with *House*, an exhibition of sculpture, drawing, painting and video by Uri Aran. Galleries, which sometimes trump museums in terms of scale and speed of presentation, do new art best. Even when it has ancient resonance.

Aran's first show in New York in seven years fills three floors of this former brewery and includes loaves of aging fresh bread arrayed on library shelves like edible books. The passing of time from yesterday to tomorrow has a physical presence here — no human bodies needed.

On entry, I felt disoriented by the array of seemingly unrelated works. “They look like relics of something, I don’t know what,” the collector Shelley Fox Aarons observed at the opening. Her other half, Phil Aarons, who collects printed matter, helped himself to one of the doctored New York Times editions stacked on a plinth. So did everyone, an impressive number of whom were other artists—Wade Guyton, Jacqueline Humphries, Ryan Sullivan, to name three. Though other enthused collectors, like Marty and Rebecca Eisenberg, were present, the artists seemed to be the ones buying. “Uri’s an artist whose work other artists want to own,” Gavin Brown said.

Aran’s mixed-media paintings are abstractions of their making—beautiful and so densely layered they take time to discern. Sculptural works, typically for this artist, include found tables appointed with so many objects and materials (corn husks recur), they slip around your eyes while you are looking. The big crowd-pleaser was a 20-foot wall spread, barcode-like, with what many took to be ancient copper knives, but actually were cast-bronze tongue depressors. “Easy to carve,” the artist explained.

The more time I spent with his work, the more absorbed I became. This was not my experience at MoMA, but I give the museum credit for throwing its chips in the air for other artists to catch.

Shelf Life/Force Life by Adam Linder and Shahryar Nashat, Museum of Modern Art, until 8 March and Uri Aran: House, Gavin Brown Enterprise, until 5 April

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