

The New York Times

Vern Blosum

'Late Work'

Essex Street
114 Eldridge Street,
Lower East Side
Through June 21

Each of the 11 amusing, poster-size pencil drawings in this exhibition presents a neatly rendered object accompanied by block-lettered captions. The text below the image of a fly swatter reads "No Fly Zone." "Obsolescence" shows a sidewalk mailbox with



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
AND ESSEX STREET, NEW YORK

"Obsolescence," one of 11 new poster-size pencil works in Vern Blosum's show of late works at Essex Street.

its open lower compartment revealing an empty interior, an allusion to the triumph of email. "Ideologues" is illustrated by a pile of decomposing logs. Curiously, a gallery news release says these and the show's other drawings are the first works produced by Vern Blosum since 1964.

Who is Mr. Blosum?

In the early 1960s, many Modernist abstract painters reacted to Pop Art with fear and loathing. One of them, using the pseudonym Vern Blosum, expressed his annoyance by perpetrating a

hoax. From 1961 to 1964, he produced about 45 Pop-style paintings of images similar to the drawings in this exhibition. The art world was snookered. The art dealer Leo Castelli, reportedly unaware of the deception, represented Mr. Blosum. His paintings were included in numerous Pop Art shows, big-name collectors bought them and the Museum of Modern Art acquired one. Then rumors of Mr. Blosum's nonexistence began to circulate. Anxious that he might be found out and his reputation as a serious painter damaged, the artist ended his project and it fell down the memory hole — until 2013, when examples were shown at the Los Angeles gallery Tomwork and at this Lower East Side gallery. Last year, the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland mounted a Blosum retrospective. These developments inspired the artist, whose real name has not been publicly revealed, to resurrect his avatar.

Without the back story, this exhibition wouldn't be as interesting as it is. But as it is, it brings to light a sociologically piquant episode in American art history.

KEN JOHNSON