

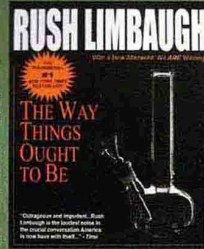
THE BONG SHOW

NEW YORK ARTISTS HIT THE PIPE.

BY CARLO MCCORMICK

Conceived over a course of informal conversations, *The Bong Show*, which premiered last December at Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects in New York, went a long way toward proving that the criminal proclivities and creative elasticity associated with enjoying marijuana are well acclimated to the aesthetic temper of contemporary artists. Taking the phrase "This is not a pipe" (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*) from René Magritte's iconic Surrealist mind-bender *Treachery of Images* (1929) as both the subtitle for the show and the subversive conceptual whimsy behind her exhibition, curator and artist Beverly Semmes gathered together two dozen idiosyncratic imaginations to muse on the amusing and problematic place that this beloved and reviled delivery system occupies in the hierarchy of cultural artifacts.

Reflecting the myriad varieties of this remarkable plant, the diversity of the artists—and their widely differing takes on the bong—offers the viewer an appealing array, whatever one's tastes. While some of the artists followed the consumer's mandate of functionality, many more pursued form as a kind of fantasy. A number directed their gaze toward the social, cultural and political dimensions of this subject, while others located far more personal meanings. From the formalist to the frivolous, *The Bong Show* collapsed meanings and associations, all but obliterating the line separating high art from the lowbrow, blurring distinctions between "art" and "craft," and rupturing the fragile web of appearances that encodes the pursuit of pleasure and enlightenment in our age of intolerance.

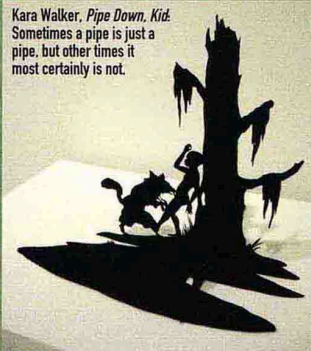


John Miller, *The Way Things Ought to Be*. Don't you wish that they had put a bong on the jacket of Rush Limbaugh's best-selling book?

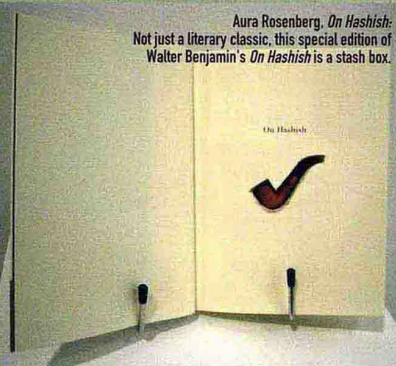


Brian Tolle, *"Boing"*. In the spirit of Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures, this bong has clearly had too much to smoke.

An Chu, *Bong Cat* (left): Modeled after the classic "lucky cat," whose beckoning paw is supposed to bring good fortune.



Kara Walker, *Pipe Down, Kid*. Sometimes a pipe is just a pipe, but other times it most certainly is not.

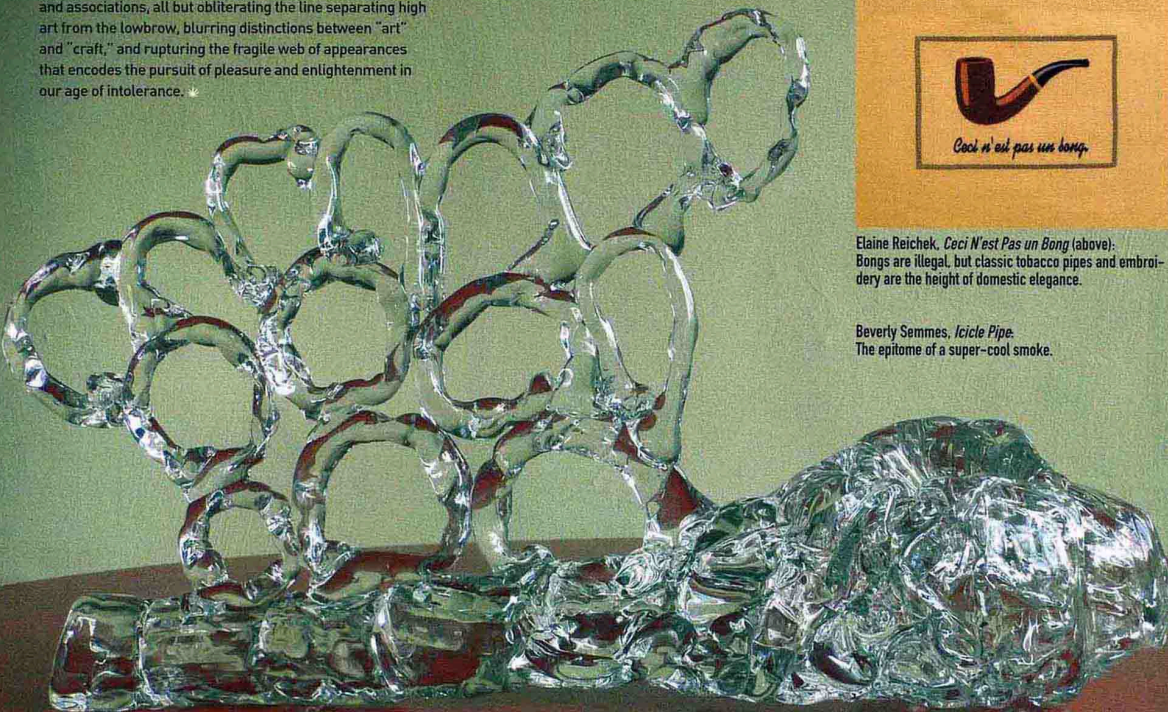


Aura Rosenberg, *On Hashish*: Not just a literary classic, this special edition of Walter Benjamin's *On Hashish* is a stash box.



Elaine Reichel, *Ceci N'est Pas un Bong* (above). Bongs are illegal, but classic tobacco pipes and embroidery are the height of domestic elegance.

Beverly Semmes, *Ice Pipe*. The epitome of a super-cool smoke.



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