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An Exhibit of an Exhibit: Prina Looks Back

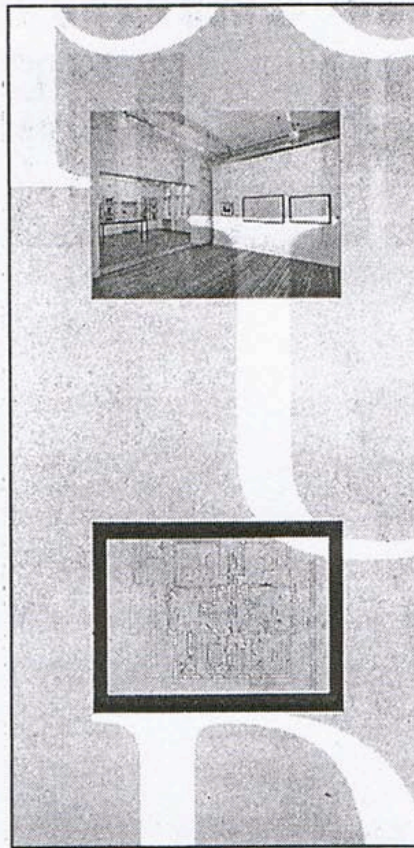
Art Review

By CLAUDINE ISE
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Stephen Prina long has been concerned with the ways in which works of art—and art history—are “framed,” so to speak, by the institutionalized value systems through which we create and shape meaning. In the past his rigorously executed, highly self-referential installations were filled with abstruse art-historical allusions and, at times, maddening formal symmetry.

To some, his projects smacked of elitism. Yet Prina’s goals remain essentially populist in nature, although it’s the kind of populism that’s filtered through (and legitimized by) a range of institutional and academic establishments.

Prina’s latest exhibition at Margo Leavin Gallery is titled “Push Comes to Love,” a name he’s also given to his just-released solo album of pop-folk music. Prina’s exhibition reframes and recontextualizes a retrospective of his own work, held at the DAAD Gallery in Berlin. In one room, 15 handsome, oak-framed diptychs overlaid with translucent gray or green scrims spell out the words “Retrospection,” “Under Duress” and “Duress, Reprise,” words that were



Margo Leavin Gallery

Stephen Prina reframes his work shown at the DAAD Gallery in Berlin in “Push Comes to Love.”

used for the title of Prina’s 1996 exhibition at the Margo Leavin Gallery.

Each diptych contains a black-and-white installation shot of Prina’s Berlin retrospective paired

with a floor plan of the DAAD Gallery, the latter framed in thick, black borders. The outlines of these floor plans reappear as faint brush traces in several otherwise unremarkable monochrome paintings, which hang in the main gallery space.

These are atypical installation shots in that you can barely perceive the actual artwork hanging on the walls. Instead, the images provide peripheral views of the DAAD Gallery’s interior architecture: ceiling track lights, door jambs, cornices and temporary walls. Five postcard-sized silver gelatin contact prints hung in another room re-present several of these same views in a more straightforward fashion.

Prina has always been more interested in highlighting the ways that viewers derive meaning from art and culture than in creating “great works” of his own. After years of cannibalizing his own work and that of others, however, Prina’s once-meaty ideas feel like they’ve been chewed over one too many times, sucked dry of any juice or flavor they once had.

• Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through June 12. Closed Sundays and Mondays.