

The New York Times

THE LISTINGS, October 15, 2004

TIM DAVIS

In time for election season, Tim Davis's bracing show of 79 color photographs at the Bohlen Foundation is titled "My Life in Politics." After 9/11, Mr. Davis, like many people, felt confused. At his father's house one day he snapped a picture of his grandmother's collection of old lefty political pins. The image seemed to him a chance memorial to a lost time in which good and bad were well defined and people knew where they stood. Mr. Davis decided to find out what his own political identity looked like. So for two years he crisscrossed the country and knocked on doors. He found a gun show in a mall in Missouri, which sold books like "Know Your Czechoslovakian Pistols." He stopped at statehouses, visited politicians' offices and discovered a Communist summer camp in Massachusetts where kids split into teams called the Hollywood Ten and the World War I Refusniks. The results turn out to be odd fragments, the detritus and faint traces of American life, saturated with color, ambiguous and deeply melancholy. Mr. Davis aspires to something of Walker Evans's deadpan gaze, his dry wit and laconic curiosity. His photographs, refusing to propagandize, imply a pity for both left and right, a sense that democracy is a messy business. So is this show. But it also reminds us that the camera, by its nature, can lend a curious grace to whatever it sees, no matter how forlorn or marginal. (Bohlen Foundation, 415 West 13th Street, West Village, (212) 414-4575, through Nov. 5; free.)

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