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Barton Lidice Benes

Johnson, Ken. "Barton Lidice Benes", The New York Times, June 25, 1999.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 25, 1999

ART IN REVIEW

Barton Lidice Benes

Lennon, Weinberg
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through July 30

Barton Lidice Benes produces modern reliquaries. Each of the New York artist's wall-hung constructions is a broad, shallow box divided into a grid of little cubbyholes, each containing a labeled, more or less sacred relic. Among the scores of items displayed in "Celebrity" you will find a police badge worn by Sean Penn in the movie "Colors" and a little wad of Dustin Hoffman's chewing gum. "O. J. Simpson" contains one of Johnnie L. Cochran Jr.'s silk handkerchiefs and lip balm used by Brian (Kato) Kaelin. Not all objects are associated with famous people: "Disasters" includes a mosaic tile from Pompeii, oil from the Exxon Valdez and ash from Mount St. Helens.

Much depends on your belief in the authenticity of these objects. If

you thought for a second that any one of them was fake, you would lose interest. Though elaborately framed and well made, the constructions are not so compelling imaginatively or formally that you are willing to suspend disbelief, as you do, for example, with Joseph Cornell's miniature museums.

Taking things for real, you are impressed and amused by the artist's resourceful collecting. And you have to admit a certain primitive excitement if not awe in the presence of Nancy Reagan's chocolate-soufflé-smearred napkin. Mr. Benes's ironic devotional works invite contemplation of a Warholian world in which the gods have been replaced by celebrities and history has devolved into trivial pursuits.

KEN JOHNSON