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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER and WILL HEINRICH FEB. 9, 2017



Matt Keegan's show at Participant Inc. is titled "Generation," as is the two-channel, 45-minute video installation that is its centerpiece. Courtesy of the artist and Participant Inc

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

MATT KEEGAN

*Through Sunday. Participant Inc., 253 East Houston Street, Manhattan;
212-254-4334, participantinc.org.*

Tolstoy may have explained the difference between happy and unhappy families: The first are all alike; the second are unhappy in their own way. But he never mentioned average families for whom such feelings twist together. For that, there is Matt Keegan's show at Participant Inc., his first solo in New York since 2011. It is titled "[Generation](#)," as is the two-channel, 45-minute video installation that is its centerpiece.

Executed in an uninflected D.I.Y. documentary style, "Generation" is alternately funny, poignant and sad. It stars three generations of Mr. Keegan's immediate family, including his parents, siblings, nieces and a precocious nephew. Each of them is asked to define a series of fairly charged words, including "love," "sex," "race," "anger," "nationalism," "immigrant," "masculine" and "history." It's all quite simple, but what you learn about family dynamics, knowledge and language — as well as the wisdom of age — is amazing. The youngest niece describes race as a competition; Mr. Keegan's father sees it as "something just made up."

The video includes a few interviews in the subjects' habitats, and occasionally Mr. Keegan asks people to describe a word as a physical object, while the second screen illustrates responses in animated form. Other animations include a pitcher of water poured over a human brain, nourishing it. Mr. Keegan's interests being multimedia, the show also includes three large, handsome wall pieces in powder-coated steel seemingly based on bits of folded-and-cut paper. They emit low vibrations, serving as speakers for audio tracks generated with the sound artist Sergei Tcherepnin using the wall reliefs themselves as drums. Their tones work well as ambient accompaniment for the video. It's a little like having a large, friendly family pet in the next room.

ROBERTA SMITH