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New York art galleries focus on politically oriented collections

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The November shows at New York galleries give us good a survey of new art as you'll get. Right now, what they're showing is more substantial than usual, with less of the normal market-driven fluff. Whether because of our recent elections or our generally dour times - or just because it's in fashion - there's a political cast to a lot of the best work .

Here are some exhibitions that reveal that direction.

"*The Tower: A Songspiel*," at Postmasters - "The Tower" is a video by a Russian collective called "Chto Delat?" ("What Is To Be Done?") - a name taken from a famous pamphlet by Lenin. So yes, there are politics involved.

The wonderful thing about "The Tower," however, is its extremely complex view of political realities. Chto Delat's video documents a performance of a deliberately stilted piece of agitprop theater, modeled on the Weimar-era "musicals" of Bertolt Brecht. Elite conspirators - a greedy CEO, a craven politician, a grasping mafioso, an amoral priest and an egocentric dealer and her pet artist - sit on a high dais, scheming to force through St. Petersburg's first office tower, and take turns pitching it to the masses below. (Literally "below" - they stand at the foot of the dais.) The "people" aren't united, however. They're grouped into choruses of intellectuals, workers, pensioners, burghers and youths - each with its own desires and priorities, which they take turns singing out.

Rather than advancing a single clear position, as Brecht's theater did, "The Tower" documents the impasses and agendas that dominate politics in post-Soviet Russia - and in other countries one might name.

Through Dec. 4 at Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St., New York. Call 212-727-3323 or www.postmastersart.com.