



Fig. 4. Dennis Kardon, *Detail, Jewish*

*Noses, 1993–1995.* LEFT TO RIGHT: TOP ROW, *Helene Winer, Jay Gorney*; MIDDLE ROW, *Josh Decter, Adam Bellow, Laurie Simmons*; BOTTOM ROW, *Nan Goldin, David Deutsch.*

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teenage years, acts as the surrogate for the artist's Jewish identity. And it confronts the problem of representing Jewish bodies in American popular culture, given "Streisand's unWASPy looks, a big nose, and a reputation for business shrewdness (read in the ethnic stereotype of 'pushy')." <sup>37</sup>

Of all the stereotypes in the above quotation, the notion of the "Jewish nose" has become most important for a number of Jewish artists in the show, as in Dennis Kardon's ongoing series, *Jewish Noses* (fig. 4; plates 6 and 7). Kardon has here taken the dominant stereotypical feature for recognizing the otherness of the Jewish body in America and made academically modeled sculptural portraits of it. His models are art world personages, including other Jewish artists, curators, dealers, and collectors. He sculpts these pieces directly from the model and then meticulously paints them with lifelike veracity. These highly detailed works examine the societal constructions built upon body differences, a legacy of the physiognomic racist theories of the last century. Cultural critic and sociologist Sander Gilman reminds us that medical theories about the difference of the Jewish body moved from the notion of Jews as racially black, that is, having more pigmented skin, to an ethnic issue by which the Jewish body becomes different precisely because of such features as a Semitic nose. As Jews internalized these racist theories, any variant on supposedly "neutral," "Aryan"—read superior—noses became a troubling ethnic index to Jews themselves. <sup>38</sup>

By exhibiting these portrait "fragments" together as a group, and labeling the noses with the names of his art world sitters, Kardon parodies the earlier anthropological obsession with describing, collecting, and labeling cultural specimens in an attempt to fix "difference" among groups. Kardon reveals the ludicrousness of a practice which is itself based on nineteenth-century racist enterprise. The purposeful futility of Kardon's documentary fastidiousness and the inability of such an enterprise to furnish useful information recalls the Korean American artist Byron Kim's multicolored panels (fig. 3) that record, in excruciating detail, the specific shades of "brown," "yellow," and "white" pigmentation in his collection of painted swatches of the skin colors of his friends. Meanwhile, the quantity of Kardon's output—this sculptural project features forty-nine noses—recognizes the extensive participation of Jews in the New York art world. In effect, he has created a symbolic group portrait of a Jewish community within the art community, but one which has lost all social, religious, and ethnic coherence.

Kardon's noses were but the artist's first attempt to problematize his ethnic and religious identity. His more recent painting, *Lover's Quarrel* of 1994 (fig. 2), marks a shift from group identity to personal scrutiny. A double self-portrait, *Lover's Quarrel* shows Kardon from the back attached to his double as if they were Siamese twins. A scar exists at the join between the two nearly identical figures. One of the likenesses is wearing a baseball cap—the current popular male fashion accessory—the other a skullcap (a traditional Jewish head covering indicating religious observance and respect for God). These two selves, the secular and the religious, signal Kardon's continuing dilemma—a legacy of the assimilatory values which still affect many minority Americans—about whether to separate or integrate these two aspects of self.



Fig. 2. Dennis Kardon, *Lover's Quarrel, 1994.*



6. DENNIS KARDON  
Detail, *Jewish Noses, 1993–1995*

LEFT TO RIGHT:  
TOP ROW: *Meyer Vaisman, Helene Winer, Jay Gorney, Deb Kass*;  
MIDDLE ROW: *Janet Kardon, Josh Decter, Adam Bellow, Laurie Simmons, Andrea Bellag*;  
BOTTOM ROW: *Haim Steinbach, Nan Goldin, David Deutsch, Rona Pondick*

7. DENNIS KARDON  
Detail, *Jewish Noses, 1993–1995*  
*Adam Bellow*

