

REGEN PROJECTS

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Offbeat and charming Art Review: John Bock at Regen Projects II

John Bock's video installations at Regen Projects II make wicked fun of just about everything they draw on. More important, they steer clear of the mean-spirited viciousness of much public discussion, replacing the castigating tone of talk radio with slapstick antics, anarchistic nonsense and off-balanced charm. You leave the German artist's fourth solo show in Los Angeles in a better mood than when you came in -- less fretful about life's nagging details and more attuned to its mysterious magic.

At first, the show looks spare. Plenty of crisp, well-lighted emptiness surrounds Bock's four sculptural ensembles. Each requires about the same amount of floor space it would take to park a small car.

Three are viewing stations. Small monitors with headphones play videos of Bock's cock-eyed performances, in which he employs the props now found in the stations.

The centerpiece, "Nothingness under the jaw," consists of a transparent shower curtain that wraps around a doughnut-shaped desk. An odd mélange of objects clutters the desk. Made of wire, bicycle fenders and clay, they look functional but are too crude to get the job done. Think of the stuff MacGyver might make on a bad day, or a kid's homemade rendition of laboratory paraphernalia.

The video is even weirder. In it, Bock plays a doctor who operates on a patient while they converse in German. As actors, they're amateurish. The sets and costumes are rudimentary. But the two play their roles with just the right mix of seriousness and silliness, restraint and recklessness.

Their language is brilliant, its phrasing and syntax the misbegotten offspring of 1990s art-jargon, construction-site profanity and pre-adolescent humor. "Young Frankenstein" by Mel Brooks comes to mind, as does the pace and palette of Pedro Almodovar's off-color melodramas. The screwball goofiness of Otto Muehl's participatory performances also plays an important part in Bock's multilayered farce.



"Lichterloh roh" brings together glass-doored coolers, a glass-topped freezer, frozen pizzas, a papier-mâché corpse and a video in which Bock, dressed as a lab technician, lectures in German to a group of similarly dressed students. No translation is available but the reference to Joseph Beuys is unmistakable. In Bock's mock homage, the shamanistic nonsense and naked prevarication made famous by Beuys get filtered through low-budget, DIY, crime-scene TV.

"Pi Bean" delivers a sense of vaudeville gone wrong. The style is bargain-bin Matt Barney, cheap tricks and dumb gags replacing Hollywood slickness.

Bock's fourth piece is a bonus, a scrappy sculpture that resembles a mutant puppet whose torso does double-duty as a stage. Packed with 67 drawings, "Pole Poppenspieler" is also a makeshift storage chest, a loopy totem and a compact monument to the underdog optimism that drives the whole show and animates Bock's manic artistry.

-- David Pagel

