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GAGOSIAN GALLERY
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Some Shows for Escape, Some for Introspection

When the dog days arrive, many New York art galleries put their solo expositions on ice and turn their exhibition spaces into pluralistic laboratories to test new talent and experiment with cool ideas. If you can stand the heat, it is a great time to be out looking at contemporary art.

An unscientific and incomplete survey of groups shows already open—more openings will follow after the holiday weekend—finds a retiring, introspective mood. It looks as if the art world had gone into retreat from the endless barrage of bad news coming from the world at large.

The one politically motivated exhibition, at Zwirner & Wirth, is tellingly called “Quiet Politics.” Elsewhere, titles like “I Won’t Grow Up” (at Cheim & Read) and “Deep Comedy” (Marian Goodman) suggest escape-uprisings.

Shows with enigmatic titles like “Not So Subtle Subtitle” (Casey Kaplan) and “Crop Rotation” (Marianne Boesky) reflect the obscurely personal tastes of their owners. “Retrospective” (Gagosian) takes an art historical turn, and “The Stranger” (Yvon Lambert) finds its inspiration in the nihilistic novel by Albert Camus.

Zwirner & Wirth: More elegant than inflammatory, “Quiet Politics” presents works expressing political impulses in understated ways. “Untitled (Fear)” by Felix Gonzalez-Torres is an incandescent Minimalist box made of blue-tinted mirrors. David Hammons’s spontaneous reduction of the African-American Flag—the United States flag but in black, red and green—is as iconic as it is suggestive. Among other possibilities, it might be a site-specific reiteration of Jasper Johns’s flag paintings.

Vald Rend’s fictitious video showing sunsets supposedly recorded by a Brazilian surveillance-camera operator has an affecting, elegiac feeling, and Michael Brown’s stainless-steel simulation of a cracked mirror freezes an act of anarchic rage into a lovely, spiderweb web.

Chemin & Read: Organized by the collector Beth Rudin DeWoody and the artist Donald Baechler, “I Won’t Grow Up” presents almost 60 pieces that look as if they were made by or for children, created by more than 30 artists. Why so many artists these days—including here, Jeff Koons, Louise Bourgeois, Takashi Murakami, Jané and Dilsea Chapman and Mike Kelley—should be so preoccupied by child-like remains unexplained, but it is an entertaining show.

Mark Fox’s video “Nottixila,” in which a giant Mr. Peanuts videographically attacks the Cincinnati Art Museum, is hilarious. George Stoll’s hand-made, child-size costumes, once a skeleton and the other a clown, are delightfully eccentric. And Tim Liddy’s painted simulation of an old Twister game box is an extraordinary feat of trompe l’oeil realism.

Marian Goodman: “Deep Comedy,” which was organized by the artist Dan Graham and the curator Sylvie Fleury, is an exercise in not quite doing quite too much of that title’s promise. “Skeptical Wit” would be more accurate for this exhibition, which includes works by Jeff Koons, Jeff Wall, David Huss, Donald Sultan, John Baldessari, Wade Weiss and Rodney Graham. But there are some instances of fairly promising work.

John Wolny’s cartoon-style painting of Donald Duck giving birth and Vika Celmins’s painting of a steaming electric frying pan are both mysteriously funny. A video by Michael Smith and Joshua White about a fabricated business is a critical and scathing spoof of New Age entrepreneurism. Christian Jankowski’s mock-documentary in which nonprofessional child actors play famous artists discussing their works satirizes art-world language and customs to surprisingly touching effect.

(Comedy lovers, by the way, might find the potential for more of the Adam Baugold Gallery where “Road Works” offers a rich selection of photos, paintings and sculptures about life on the road by more than 20 serious artists, including H.C. Westermann, Saul Steinberg and Joseph Yoan-

Casey Kaplan: Matthew Brennan’s selection of mostly small works on paper by 24 other artists has an insider feel. It includes Christopher Williams’s photograph of the blank white back of an art book from 1968; photographs by John Stezaker in which postcards depicting racist are pasted over fine art nills of lev- er, small abstractions by Nick Maus made by scratching through aluminum leaf into a black, glossy field; and two posters for a Wade Guyton exhibition in London illustrated by photographs of a muscular man’s torso.

What holds it all together is an exquisite aliveness to form and materials, and an acute subtlety to conventions of style and representation. It is absorbing and often puzzlingly ambiguous.

Marianne Boesky: Organized by the independent curator Clarissa Dalrymple, “Crop Rotation” is attempting to perplex Mark Briono’s show, but it is more theatrically engaging. The words “walk” and “talk” printed in yellow and black on a length of plastic stuck to the floor—a piece from 1978 by Ferdinand Kriwet—lead to a room where a wooden structure by Marc Brill holds up three horizontal mirrors reflecting words spray-painted in rev- erence on the wall. They read, “The construction of life is at present a matter of the construction of the maker’s earlier efforts.”

Along with pieces on paper by Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns, there’s “Red,” a terrific, mostly gray canvas by Andy Warhol that has images of Mao, Marilyn, a car crash, a tomati- soups, and a cow and a big red flower silk-screened on it.

One fascinating room presents written and photographic docu- mentation of all of the performances Chris Burden did from 1971 to 1973. Another has all the films and videos of Douglas Gordon that have produced since 1992, running in the dark on 35 monitors.

Yvon Lambert: An enigmatic ar- ray of seven sculptures by seven artists, “The Stranger” might be a meditation on the absurdity of the human condition. Richard Jackson’s “Big Baby,” a large, yellow smiley face made of plastic with padded, humanoid limbs and male genitalia at- tached, lies on its pedestal like a helpless infant. Berndt de Bruijcker’s wax torso an boy-child’s head with a sleeping boy cradles in his lap the head of a sleeping, grandsoned- merly, mermaid, could be a scene from a new children’s Spiegelberg fantasy. Meanwhile, in a nod to the show’s title, George Segal’s blue woman at a cafe table reads from a real copy of that tale of existen- tial malaise by Camus.

Ferdinand Kriwet’s “Walk Talk,” from the show “Crop Rotation.”

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Andrew Holmberg, Executive Director, Gagosian Gallery, New York.

"Red," by Andy Warhol, part of a show at the Gagosian Gallery.